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DEATH OVER HER SHOULDER

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BY

DOROTHY COLE MEADE

AUTHOR OF

"Fatal Shadows," "The Shadow of a Hair,"
and "Hostages"

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A



TO
WILLIAM M. ROCKWELL

In grateful appreciation

DEATH OVER HER SHOULDER

CHAPTER I

The girl who had been sitting so rigidly in the back seat of the taxi as it nosed its way like a half-drowned beetle through the tropical storm gave a sigh of relief when the battered Ford jerked to a final halt. Eagerly she tried to peer through the curtain of rain, but she could distinguish only the dark bulk of the house raised on piles above the driveway. The dim lights of the taxi stared blindly through the rainy night across a mass of wet, fragrant shrubbery, and even the vivid flashes of green and blue lightning showed nothing of the house save steep narrow steps leading up into a vague blackness.

Above the roar of the thunder and the crackle of lightning, Nancy heard the Chinese driver shout, "Hey, Boy! Hey Boy! Ada Mem!" There was no answer, no welcome sound of running feet, no glimmer of light through an opened door, and with a disgusted snort, "Boys pergi wayong!" the Chinaman scrambled reluctantly from his seat. The word "wayong" reminded Nancy of the scene they had passed a few minutes before: there had been a lull in the storm, as though, after its first furious onslaught, it had run out of ammunition. Through the

breathless silence, she had heard the heavy beating of a metallic drum, the penetrating whine of native violins, and leaning forward on the seat, Nancy had seen that the tunnel of rubber trees through which the car had been crawling had opened into a clearing, and that on either side of the rutted, rain-washed road, squares and oblongs of smoky light glowed in the massed shadows of squat buildings. The Chinese taxi driver had slowed down and, partially turning a sleek black head and flat cheek, had said over his shoulder, "Wayong," with a splutter of explanation she hadn't understood. However, Nancy had read about wayongs, and although she hadn't seen any native dances or plays in her four months in the Far East, she had forgotten her anxiety long enough to stare wistfully toward the sound of Malayan revelry. Then the thunder and lightning resumed their attack with renewed vigor, drowning out the eerie wails of the violins, and dropping a grey veil of rain over the cluster of bamboo huts. Once more the car had lurched forward, slithering and groping for purchase in the flooded ruts, and once more Nancy had been submerged in the morass of her personal fears.

The taxi driver's temper as he now slammed open the door of the car was due, she realized, to the fact that servants should have rushed out to take her suitcase instead of going off to the wayong and leaving a respectable Chinaman to get wet and to perform the menial job of depositing her light baggage on the veranda. A

smile flickered across her lips as Nancy stepped out into the rain. Her smart blue linen suit and hat were already shapeless, her bright bronze hair was plastered in dark loops on her pale cheeks, but she didn't care. Her nightmare journey was ended, and in just a few seconds now Lydia would be welcoming her, fussing about her wet clothes, calming her fears, laughing away her worry.

Lydia of course must have had some good reason for not meeting the train, otherwise she would never have permitted Nancy to wander forlornly along the strange cinder platform at Kluang, pushing her way through groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians as she searched for a taxi driver who could understand her halting scraps of Malay; nor would she have permitted a guest, even an uninvited one, to spend her last silver dollars for the long, fifteen-mile drive from Kluang to the isolated Semang Rubber Estate. Probably Lydia hadn't received the telegram which Nancy had sent from Tapah Roads announcing her arrival on the 9.05 train. That made it awkward of course, but it was more comforting than her alternative fear—that Lydia simply didn't want Nancy to come; that she hadn't expected her invitations to be taken seriously by the lonely American girl whom she had befriended on the long journey from Southampton to Penang. Much as she had liked Lydia, Nancy had never expected to take advantage of their shipboard friendship; never expected to see Lydia again, nor visit the isolated rubber plantation which Lydia had described

so glowingly, or to share in the intimate, circumscribed life that existed among the manager and assistant managers on that 2000-acre estate. Certainly Nancy had never dreamed that she would one day make a headlong, panic-stricken flight half way across the Malayan Peninsula to throw herself on Lydia's mercy, trusting that Lydia, the one friend she had in the Far East, would shelter and help her.

Nancy, stumbling up the steep, slippery steps behind the Chinaman, was so busy trying to decide how best to inform Lydia of her plight, that it was not until she was on the veranda itself, had dropped her last remaining dollars in the greedy outstretched palm, and had seen the Chinaman plunge through the rain into the waiting car, that she realized the house was in complete darkness.

A wild unreasoning panic seized her, and she rushed to the veranda door, shrieking for the Chinaman to wait, to take her with him; but the wind, rushing through the tossing boughs of the lime trees on the terrace, blew her cry away, and the car, having manipulated the circular driveway, dipped down the hill.

Nancy, getting a grip on her emotions, felt a glimmer of gratitude that the Chinaman hadn't heard her. If she had climbed back into the taxi, where could she have gone, how could she have faced the driver's indignation when she admitted that she had no money? She stood still, just inside the dusty screen door, staring around her

with wide, frightened eyes, as the weird flashes of lightning revealed the rainswept veranda—and then, for a second she relaxed. One of her fears was allayed; dangling on the arm of a wicker chair was a familiar cretonne knitting bag, the one that used to hang uselessly on the back of Lydia's steamer chair. At least she was in the right house; the Chinaman hadn't misunderstood her badly enunciated directions and abandoned her at some strange bungalow. With more confidence now, Nancy awaited the next flash which would tell her more about the house and its occupants. It came, a wincing blue dagger, illuminating briefly the rain-clogged screens, the soaked grass rugs, the sodden pillows and magazines.

The house wasn't deserted then. People had been here recently. But where was Lydia now? A longer green flash cut across the sky, illuminating the rows of shining rubber trees whose ranks seemed to halt half up the hill to the house, while thunder grumbled and gargled through the tree-choked valley, echoing and re-echoing as the encircling hills tossed back its roar.

As the sound died away, Nancy was aware of the rain rustling on the atap roof, of a shutter inside the house banging drearily to and fro, and once again she felt a rising tide of fear. The dark, lonely house filled her with a strange dread. Still, she must go inside, she couldn't stand indefinitely on the wet veranda. Reluctantly she moved forward, and groped for the doorknob. The door, swollen from dampness, stuck at first, and then groaned open on

creaking hinges. Despite the wind that rushed in with her, the air inside was pungent with mildew, and the fainter more subtle odor of decay. The noise of the rain on the roof was louder, and so was the monotonous banging of the loose shutter; and yet, somehow, both sounds served only to intensify the ominous silence of the house.

"The first thing to do is to find a light," Nancy said, matter-of-factly, hoping that the brave sound of her words would drown out the heavy thud of her heart. "Probably there is a note from Lydia explaining why she isn't here, telling me what to do." With trembling fingers she groped in her sodden handbag for her cigarette lighter, and then forced herself to close the front door. It took her several minutes to coax a flame from the little wick—her fingers were so wet, so clumsy with nervousness. Shielded by her hand, at first the tiny flickering light made no impression on the black, immense gulf of the hall that stretched before her, but as her narrowed eyes become accustomed to the feeble spurt of flame, she saw close at hand a hall table with two ornate Chinese candlesticks holding tall yellow tapers. Her spirits rose as their stiff, virgin wicks flared into guttering points of flame and threw grotesque shadows across the white-washed walls and ceiling.

Half way down the hall two wide dark doorways gaped at each other across the bare wooden floor, and beside each of them gleamed the familiar dull brass fixtures of electric lights. Her spirits rose as she hurried to-

ward them, and then sank to a corresponding depth of despair when no amount of button pushing, or even of bulb twisting, elicited any response. She had to have lights to counteract the waves of fear that swept over her; she must find candles or lamps somewhere that would chase the shadows away so that she could be sure the house, empty as it obviously was of human occupants, hadn't proved a refuge for some slinking tiger or panther, or worse yet, a snake.

Returning to the hall table for a candle, she noticed for the first time that one of the heavy candlesticks anchored a telegram to the dark polished surface. Then Lydia had received her telegram after all, she thought with relief as she picked up the white envelope. Her eyes widened as she read the message, and a bewildered frown wrinkled her forehead; this wasn't her telegram at all; this was from some one who signed herself Helene Chambers, saying she had been lucky enough to get the lead in a stock company leaving Singapore immediately for Australia, thanking Lydia for a loan, and regretting that her visit must be postponed until the next time she was stranded. It was a gay message, full of hope and courage, and Nancy's broad, sensitive mouth curved into a spontaneous smile as she read it. Lydia had been an actress too, before she had married Clive Bosworth and come out East; she'd laughed with Nancy about it on shipboard, saying that it had taken her three years to overcome the prejudice of Clive's father. This Helene

Chambers was doubtless a friend from Lydia's stage days.

Suddenly, Nancy's mouth quivered at the thought of the contrast between her own position and that of the other girl. Not only was Nancy out of a job, but it was impossible, after what had happened, for her ever to get one in the Far East; she was 10,000 miles from home, and she had literally spent her last penny to come to Lydia. Her hazel eyes darkened with dismay. What if Lydia refused to believe her story; refused to help her?

Her own telegram, she saw, was underneath Helen's—a brief message, "Arriving Kluang 9.05 tonight. Nancy Reynolds." She hadn't dared say more than that, hadn't dared send the telegram at all until she was just a few hours from her destination. She had been afraid to send it from Penang, lest she be traced—afraid to send it earlier lest Lydia wire her not to come.

What, she wondered, had Lydia thought when she received that message? How would she act now when she returned to find a derelict on her doorstep? Nancy was distressed to find that she couldn't remember Lydia's face at all, nothing except her light, windblown hair, the grace of her movements, the joyous gaiety of her laughter. She felt that she could count on Lydia, but what if Lydia's husband objected to Nancy's unceremonious arrival? She knew so little about Clive Bosworth, nothing, really, except that he loved to hunt, and Nancy had suspected that he neglected not only his work as manager

of the rubber estate, but his wife, too. Lydia cared deeply about him, that was evident from the very way she mentioned his name, even though she admitted laughingly that he was nothing but a charming, irresponsible infant, and she'd only had four letters from him in as many months.

Well, no matter whether he approved of Nancy's arrival or not, he could hardly put her out into the storm. The storm! Lydia must have left before the storm broke, or she would have closed the shutters. It was all very queer and disturbing. There was a hateful atmosphere about the house, a creeping horror that grew worse instead of less as the minutes dragged past. It wasn't the storm, nor the isolated estate hewn out of the Malayan jungle, it was something about the house itself which was frightening her so that her knees trembled and her breath came in short shallow jerks.

She couldn't control her thoughts or her fears, but at least she could stop the banging of the loose shutter that formed so dreary an accompaniment to them. Slowly she moved down the hall in the direction of the sound which came from the rear of the room on the right-hand side of the hall. It was the living room, Nancy saw, holding her candle high; a long, narrow, shadow-filled room whose furniture was distorted into vague shapes by the dimness of her light. The storm had played havoc there, too, for in addition to two unshuttered windows, the front of the room had no wall, being separated from the veranda

only by a big, half-closed Japanese screen. The room was deserted, but, despite Lydia's efforts to make it attractive, the rain-streaked curtains fluttering at the windows, the broad couch opposite the door, heaped with gay cushions, and partially concealed by the long, low teakwood table on which a broken vase spilled flowers and water among the piles of magazines and books, Nancy found herself shrinking from it—it was worse even than the hall and the veranda.

It was the rear shutter that was swinging so madly, and slowly Nancy moved toward it, fighting against the horror that was overwhelming her. She had almost reached the window when the circling of her candle flickered across the couch and she saw that some one was lying there, half buried in the pillows. Nancy's candle dropped from her nerveless fingers. Her scream was lost in a clap of thunder as her light went out.

The next thing she knew, she was wrenching at the front door, her breath sobbing in her throat. There was no sound of pursuit, no sound at all except the beating of rain on the roof, and the mocking slams of the shutter. Even the thunder with grunts and growls of rage seemed to have rumbled into the distance.

Nancy was ashamed of her panic. It must have been Lydia lying there on the couch; she thought she remembered the glimpse of a green dress against the darkness of the couch cover. But if it was Lydia, why hadn't she awakened at Nancy's scream—why was she lying

there with the rain beating in through the open shutters? unless she were sick, unconscious from some sudden attack of fever. That was it, of course. Lydia in the other room sick, and Nancy indulging in "the vapors," scaring herself to death about nothing. Filled with self-disgust, Nancy snatched the lighted candle from the hall table, and hurried back to the couch.

The figure was still lying there motionless on its side, a white arm dangling helplessly over the edge of the blue velours cover, the head and one shoulder buried in a pile of bright-hued pillows.

"Lydia!" Nancy's voice was thin and strained as she bent over the head of the couch. Slowly, reluctantly, she forced herself to pull aside an orange pillow. The candle light wavered across a white profile, caught the gold in the halo of fair hair spread on the dark couch cover. With shrinking fingers, Nancy touched the green linen shoulder—it was soft and repugnantly chill, and it fell back suddenly exposing an ominous dark stain that had oozed across the front of the crumpled green dress.

CHAPTER II

How long Nancy stood there stupidly staring down at the body of her friend, she never knew. Her throat was too stiff and dry to emit the scream that was choking her. It was the hot grease dripping from her precariously tilted candle across her clenched hand that finally aroused her from her numb horror. "So that's why I was so afraid of this house," she thought dully. "It was because Lydia was dead here all the time."

Suddenly the full significance of the scene dawned on her. Lydia was dead, and yet, the shaking candle which she forced herself to shift back and forth along the couch, along the narrow aisle between the couch and the table, revealed nothing which resembled a weapon. If Lydia had killed herself and fallen back among the pillows, the pistol or whatever she had used would be somewhere close to her body. Anyway, Lydia was too full of the joy of living ever to kill herself—and even if that had flagged for some reason, there were too many people who needed her help. Lydia would have believed that the world couldn't get on without her assistance. Who could have been brutal enough to have silenced forever Lydia's sweet, husky voice, her delightful laughter?

Just when the realization of her own predicament percolated through her shocked sorrow, Nancy didn't know. One moment she was brooding over Lydia's untimely death and feeling a slow cumulative rage at her murderer—she didn't even know when she became convinced that it was murder—and the next, she was shaking with terror at her own anomalous position. She had been alone in the house with Lydia for many minutes, how could she prove that they hadn't quarreled, that she hadn't grabbed a knife or a gun in a moment of rage and killed her? It would be a simple matter for Lydia's husband, or the police, to telephone Penang, to learn what had happened there—and then, no one in the world would believe in her innocence. At worst, she would be accused of Lydia's murder—at best, she would be turned away penniless and friendless from the house, which, much as she loathed it, was her only refuge. Wildly she stared around her. There was no place she could hide in that room, and outside there were just miles of rain tossing rubber trees, and then black, impenetrable jungle. She couldn't even cable home for money and help; it would kill her mother to get such a message, and what could her mother do anyway? It was Nancy who had been the breadwinner of the family since her father had died.

She drew a long, shuddering breath. Somehow she would have to save herself, use every bit of ingenuity she could summon, use every atom of guile, if she were

to fight her way clear. She couldn't afford to have any scruples, any consideration for any one but herself. Her tortured mind twisted among the stark facts that confronted it, and despairingly she realized that all she could do was to await developments. It was impossible to plan ahead; she was trapped for the moment.

Suddenly she caught the sound of voices, the low babel of Malay, too swift and idiomatic for her limited understanding, the rustle of sarongs, and the shuffle of bare feet on the gravel walk. For the first time she was aware that the thunder had stopped and the rain had dwindled to a half-hearted dripping. The servants must be coming back from the wayong. Could it have been one of them who had killed Lydia? would he come slinking quietly through the door to take a final look at the woman he had killed, and then, finding Nancy there, kill her too? Before her wild fear had completed itself, she had blown out the candle and was crouching in the shadows at the head of the couch.

The voices passed the side windows and died away around the corner of the house. A few minutes later, she heard the distant clatter of pans, the tinkle of dishes, and then the acrid smell of burning wood drifted through the windows. The servants had evidently started a fire, probably carrying out orders of their dead mistress. Suppose one of them had come into the living room and found her crouching like a criminal. Her face was flushed with shame as she scrambled to her feet, and picked up

her candlestick. Slowly she lit the wick again with a steady hand; she must go out to the kitchen, explain what had happened and send them for help. If they didn't understand her limited Malay vocabulary, at least she could make one of them follow her into the living room and let them see what had happened.

Quickly she smoothed down her damp skirt, and ran her fingers through her disheveled hair, trying to pat it into its usual waves, so that she would look more normal. At the door into the hall, she paused. There were more footsteps grinding along the driveway, heavy-shod feet this time, and the welcome sound of English. "Quite a show, wasn't it? Didn't think those coolies had it in them," some one was saying, and then, "They certainly have pantomime down to a fine art. Even if you couldn't understand a word of Malay, you'd have known it was 'Aladdin and the Lamp'." "Especially the lamp!" another voice said laughing, "I nearly fell off my bench when I recognized the lamp off my bicycle, ingenious devils."

"Hello! the house is all dark. The storm must have put the plant out of commission again. That means Hamilton is drunk or he'd have had it working by that time."

The steps were mounting now to the veranda, and a fresh voice with a worried note exclaimed, "Where's Lydia? There ought to be candles lighted or something."

"Probably has her head buried under the bedclothes. These storms we have out here always put her wind up.

What ho, Lydia! Come out of it, old girl. We're all feeling peckish—thought you said supper at eleven!"

It was ghastly, Nancy thought, their unconsciousness of what was waiting for them. Slowly she advanced into the hall.

There was a crash and an oath from the veranda outside, "What the bloody hell did I fall over? A suitcase!" Electric flashlights played around the porch.

"Sh," some one warned—probably Clive. "They must belong to that friend of Lydia's, Helene something or other. Lydia was expecting her to show up one day soon. Haven't seen each other since Lydia left the stage and are probably so busy pitching tales they forgot to light up." His voice sounded relieved, as though he had been more worried by the dark house than he had admitted.

The door groaned open, and Nancy, with an unconscious sense of the dramatic, held the candle picturesquely high as she breathlessly awaited their entrance.

A tall, broadshouldered man in a white suit was the first to enter, the others, she didn't know how many, crowding close on his heels. His eyes opened very wide at the sight of the slim, blue-clad girl, with the candle light flickering down on her bronze hair, and white, frightened face.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come," she gasped. "Something ghastly has happened."

They were all staring at her blankly, a circle of brown faces above white coats, faces that wavered and blurred

and then merged before her tortured eyes. "Lydia's dead," her voice seemed to come from a long way off. "She's dead. I think some one killed her." Her slender body swayed, and a pair of strong arms caught her before she hit the floor.

When she recovered consciousness, she was huddled uncomfortably on a long wicker chair, with a wet washcloth dripping icy water down her neck, while some one was trying to force a fiery liquid through her clenched teeth. Where was she? Who was the strange man stooping over her? In sudden terror, as her memory returned, she shrank as far away as the limits of the chair permitted.

"You're all right, Miss Chambers. Take a quick swallow of this and you'll be yourself in no time." The brandy burned her throat, and, spluttering, she jerked herself upright. Her quick glance into the man's worried face reassured her. No one with such anxious blue eyes, with freckles blotting a round face, pale beneath its tan, and upstanding sandy hair, she decided illogically, could be a murderer.

"I'm sorry to be so stupid," she apologized. "It's the first time in my life that I ever fainted. It was this house, first, so dark and dreadful—and then finding Lydia."

"It was a rotten experience. I'd have been knocked for a loop myself," he sympathized, and then, as he stretched himself erect, Nancy saw the rest of the room. Shades had been lifted from the electric lamps, all of

them blazing at last, and a harsh glare exposed each corner of the room—smaller than it had seemed beneath the uncertain flicker of her candle. Her fearful eyes slanted toward the couch, and she felt a tremor of relief to see that Lydia's body had been decently covered with a sheet or something white. A man was slumped in a chair near the end of the couch, as though he had sagged there, and some one had shoved a support beneath his knees. His blond head was partially hidden in a crook of his elbow, and his shoulders bobbed with racking sobs which he was trying, unsuccessfully, to muffle. A tall, good-looking youngster was pacing nervously back and forth from the living room to the dining room, his feet automatically avoiding tables and chairs, while ashes dropped unheeded from a cigarette he had forgotten to smoke.

Seated at the desk in the front of the room, a man with a profile like a Greek god was speaking in a soft southern voice over the telephone.

While she was still endeavoring to orient herself, and gather strength for the ordeal which she knew lay ahead of her, a fifth man, with the unmistakable characteristics of an Irishman, came briskly into the room. "The servants say they know nothing about this," he declared, waving a slim, facile hand toward the couch. "They left early for the wayong—in fact, ten or fifteen minutes before Clive and me. They all sat in a row, and they declare by all that is good and holy, none of them left the

group even for a drink of water. It will be easy for the police to check that, but I am inclined to believe them, they all 'wah-wahed' enough at the bad news to convince me, at any rate." He whirled toward the man at the desk. "Did you get the police station, Bill?"

The man at the telephone turned, and Nancy noticed with distaste that his full face was even more handsome than his profile, like an idealized portrait of himself, and he was probably as unbearably conceited as most attractive men.

"Yes," he replied, "I got McCleary himself. He'll be right over. It's only about fifteen miles to Kluang, and at the rate he drives, even on a night like this, he should be here in half an hour. He'll bring Doc Sparkes."

The Irishman nodded, and then crossed the room to put a hand on Clive's hunched shoulder and murmur something. Clive shook his head, but ignoring the gesture, the Irishman spoke to the youngster who was still fidgiting back and forth. "Get a shot of brandy for Clive," he ordered, "and make him swallow it, and then, for the love of Pete, sit down somewhere and give the floors a rest. You're making us all giddy." The younger man blushed to the roots of his fair hair, and bolted from the room.

"Now, then," the Irishman moved toward Nancy's chair, and automatically she braced herself to resist the personality that was directing the activities of every one else in the room. "Are you feeling better, Miss Chambers?"

Why did every one call her "Miss Chambers," she wondered, irritated—still dazed by the events which had taken place so rapidly. Then she remembered the telegram. Every one knew that Lydia expected Helene, and apparently none of them knew anything about Nancy's coming. Surreptitiously her fingers touched the crumpled telegrams, which in her agitation she had thoughtlessly shoved into her pocket. Helene Chambers with her established friendship with Lydia, her claim on Mr. Bosworth's hospitality. Nancy's lips settled into a straight line. After all, she had to look out for herself—let them go on thinking she was Helene.

The Irishman was staring down at her with a puzzled expression on his lean, tanned face, the pupils of his cat-green eyes contracted, and she realized that she hadn't even heard his last question.

"I'm sorry," she faltered, raising dark-fringed hazel eyes to his green ones, "I'm afraid I'm still a bit wonky. What was it you said?"

He smiled then, a flash of white teeth in his dark face—she was so absurdly young and frightened, so obviously trying to seem composed. "Suppose I tell you who we are first—I'd forgotten you didn't know." He glanced at the sandy-haired man whom Nancy had first seen as he had poured a drink down her reluctant throat, and who stood a few feet away, scowling at the Irishman. "He is Jim Mason, a fellow countryman of yours, second assistant on the estate."

Nancy's smile flickered toward her first friend, and then a puzzled look crossed her face—Jim Mason's eyes were as hard and cold as blue marbles, and his fists were clenched as he glowered at the Irishman. He nodded an acknowledgment of the introduction, and then, turning his back, he strolled away to talk in low tones to the good-looking man who still sat by the desk.

The Irishman's eyes twinkled. "I ought to warn you that I am not overly popular here on the estate. Perhaps I should have introduced myself first—I'm Mike Sullivan, just a no-account fifty-fifty stengah, if you know the vernacular—American Mother, the loveliest creature God ever made, and an Irish father, with half my early life divided between the two countries, and the rest of it scattered here and there in the less-populated sections of the world. 'Tis my friendship for Clive Bosworth that brings me into the scene." Nancy looked puzzled, and he added patiently, "I mean I am not connected with the estate—every one else is. You and I are the only outsiders."

Perhaps, Nancy thought, that was the reason for Jim Mason's antagonism—the estate and those who worked it might be sort of a closed corporation.

"To get on with it," Mike continued, "the youngster just coming in with the glass of brandy and soda is Dave Farnsworth, fourth assistant, and newest addition to the estate. He likewise is an American from the Middle West some place. From the way that glass is slopping

over, and the stare in his eyes, I'd say he'd been fortifying himself a bit on the side." His smile quirked at her, but without waiting for any comment, he went on, "The Adonis at the desk is Bill Pearson, third assistant, so damn good-looking that it's a handicap, and he doesn't know what to do about the whole thing. And, of course, the poor devil there beside the couch is Clive."

Was she supposed to know Clive, Nancy wondered wildly—if she was, she was sunk—as soon as he snapped to, he would recognize her and then— Mercifully, Mike relieved her anxiety, "No, I guess you don't at that—I mean know Clive—he and Lydia were married in London, and your friendship with her dated from her stage days. Ah, now you are looking better. Do you feel equal to telling us what happened here tonight?"

At his words, the other men edged forward until they formed a little group around her, all except Clive Bosworth, who still slumped in his chair, too stunned, or too indifferent to move.

"I don't really know anything—at least nothing that will help you," she began in a low, hesitant voice, "I'm not even sure what time I got to the station at Kluang, because I'd forgotten to wind my watch last night." She realized with sudden dismay that Helene would have come from Singapore, not Penang, and she had no idea when the Singapore train would have arrived. She looked helplessly at Jim Mason, the only man in whom she felt confidence. He spoke up promptly, "Her train must have

gotten in at 8.47—at least it is due then.” The train on which she had actually come arrived at 9.05; not much discrepancy of time to fill in, she thought with relief, but she would have to watch her step, be as vague as possible.

“Well, it was dark anyway, and the storm was coming up. I got hold of a taxi man who knew where the Semang Estate was, and he drove me out. The storm broke before we got here, and the trip seemed endless, so I don’t know how long it actually took. The house was dark, and no one came when the driver shouted for a boy—he said something about their all being at a wayong. He put my bags on the porch, and drove off. I called Lydia, but no one answered me. She had told me to come whenever I could.” It was difficult to stick to the literal truth, but the men were too anxious for her to complete her story to notice her hesitations. “I thought perhaps Lydia had gone to the wayong too, so when no one came to the door, I came inside. I used my cigarette lighter and lit the candles in the hall, then I came in here and found Lydia. I didn’t do it as quickly as that, of course—I was awfully frightened,” she concluded simply.

“What frightened you? Was it something you heard, Miss Chambers?” the Irishman asked. He was the only one, she thought resentfully, who didn’t seem satisfied with her story.

Nancy shook her head, “I didn’t hear anything except the storm, and a shutter that banged.”

"There's a candle and candlestick on the floor by the couch. Did you drop it, or was it already there?"

She raised candid hazel eyes toward him. "I didn't know you wanted all the details. I brought that candle in the first time—when I came in to close the shutter that was banging, it had got on my nerves. I happened to see some one lying on the couch just before I reached the window—I'd been so sure that I was alone in the house that I was startled. I dropped the candlestick and ran out into the hall before I had time to realize that it must have been Lydia. I knew that if she had just been asleep, my scream would have wakened her, even if the storm and the rain beating in hadn't, so I thought she must be unconscious—sick with a sudden attack of fever. As soon as I had a chance to reason that far, I took the other candle and went back." The Irishman nodded, but it seemed to Nancy that his gaze was skeptical. He started to speak, but the dark, handsome man, Bill Pearson, interrupted.

"Pardon me, Mike—but I wonder whether Miss Chambers saw anything of the weapon—a knife or a dagger?"

Nancy shook her head again, "No, when I realized she was dead, I looked around, as much as I could without touching anything—there was nothing."

"What I can't understand," Mike continued as though Bill hadn't spoken at all, "is why you were so frightened that you ran out of the room when you saw Lydia lying

there. What was there about the scene to upset you, when you didn't know at that time that she was dead?"

"I don't know, exactly," Nancy said, "I was frightened about the house—frightened even when I was on the veranda—by its darkness, and its silence. Then I made up my mind that there was no one here. When I went in to close the window—shutter, I mean—my candle just gave me a glimpse of some one on the couch—I only saw the outline of a figure, there were so many cushions there, and her face was buried in them. I didn't think at all. I was so startled, my fingers just let go of the candle, it fell and went out. Then I ran back to the hall." She hesitated, "Perhaps I ought to tell you that I lifted aside an orange pillow that hid Lydia's face, and when I touched her shoulder, it fell back. It had been hunched over so she was lying on her side."

Mike Sullivan leaned forward eagerly. "You didn't say that before—about touching her. Will you tell us just how she was lying when you first saw her, and how you changed her position? That is very important."

Nancy shuddered and turned appealing eyes toward Jim Mason. Once more he came to her defense. "Go easy there, Sullivan. Miss Chambers has been through a pretty rough time. Sounds as though you suspected her of the murder."

Mike flushed, and for the first time seemed less sure of himself. "I didn't mean anything of the sort," he protested, "I only wanted to get the story straight while it

was fresh in her mind. She'll have to go over it with the police, and if she thinks clearly about it now, it will make things easier for her later." He flashed a smile at the girl, one compounded of apology and camaraderie, but Nancy refused to respond.

"I've told you everything I could," she murmured, biting her lip. "When I went back the second time, she was lying just as I left her, and I must have noticed subconsciously that there was no sound of breathing, for suddenly I was dreadfully afraid, even more than I had been. I managed to pull one pillow aside, and I saw her face—her profile, rather, and her outspread hair. I must have known then that she was dead, but I touched her shoulder. It was hunched up, as I told you. I didn't press it, or anything, but at my touch it moved back, as though settling into place, and then I saw the stain on the front of her dress." Nancy's chin quivered—it was too dreadful, having to re-live that moment so many times.

The Irishman's voice was gentle; they had all been affected by her story, and the very evident effort it had caused her. "Just one thing more, Miss Chambers—when you saw Lydia the second time, did you get the impression that she had collapsed into that position, or that she had been flung there?"

A horrified murmur came from some man in the group; Clive Bosworth groaned, and Jim Mason said in

quick protest, "You're going too far, Sullivan. It's ghastly enough without putting on the screws."

Mike Sullivan's green eyes were staring down into Nancy's white, strained face, dragging the words from her pale lips. "Yes, that was it," she whispered, "I didn't realize it before. That was what was so dreadful—why I knew she had been murdered. She couldn't have fallen like that by herself—some one killed her and then flung her down."

Nancy had forgotten herself, the role she had assumed, and the effort she must make to play it out. She knew only that the Irishman's brutality had clarified her impressions. "It must have been some one she knew," Nancy continued, unaware that she had stumbled to her feet. "Don't you see? Lydia was strong, wiry, yet she didn't put up any fight." Her accusing gaze swept the group of men in front of her. "She was stabbed while she was facing her murderer—he was standing close to her, or she would have seen her danger. It must have been some one she knew—knew well, and trusted!"

CHAPTER III

Nancy's accusation had a startling effect on the group of men she was facing. There were exclamations of surprise, of protest, of dismay—and yet somehow none of them rang true—it was as though she had merely put into words what each of them had been secretly thinking. Glances met, clashed and shifted as each man tried surreptitiously to study the others.

Mike Sullivan was the first to break through the clammy cloud of suspicion that had settled on the room. "You're probably right, Miss Chambers, though it is hard to believe that any one who knew Lydia could have harmed her. You mustn't forget, though, that in addition to a handful of white men, there are hundreds of coolies on the estate, to say nothing of a couple of dozen servants—any one of whom could have approached Lydia with a cooked-up story that would gain her sympathy. It is too early to jump to conclusions."

Nancy felt deflated. She had been a fool to be carried away like that—to make enemies when she so desperately needed friends—and yet, somehow she was sure that Lydia had been killed by a white man. She felt a fresh blaze of dislike for the Irishman who had rebuked her.

"I can't see that this discussion is getting anywhere," Jim Mason declared. "Let's skip it."

"Maybe not, but at least we have some idea now of when the murder took place," Mike said.

"I don't see it," young Farnsworth put in. "Lord, isn't it bad enough to have Lydia killed without talking, talking, talking about it!" His voice had a hysterical note as he glared at the imperturbable Irishman.

"What do you want to do, sit and drink yourself blotto?" Mike asked contemptuously. Dave flushed, and his hands clenched, but he said nothing in reply to the taunt. "If we can get certain facts established," Mike went on, "it will save time. What the police will want is a clear statement of what happened here so far as any one of us know it."

"Well, no one knows what happened, so you might as well save your breath." Jim Mason was deliberately rude. He resented Mike's jibe at Dave, the poor kid drank very little as a rule—he was just upset tonight, who the hell did that Irish stiff think he was, anyway?

Instead of being angry, Mike Sullivan's voice was suddenly suave. "Oh, yes, we have collected several facts that are going to help: we know that it was murder and not suicide, for we couldn't find any weapon. We know that Lydia was alive at ten minutes of nine when Clive and I left for the wayong—she didn't go herself because she said, after the first dozen she'd seen, they bored her with their sameness. She let the servants off for the eve-

ning, but they were to come back at ten-thirty so they could prepare supper for the crowd. Lydia said she would fix the flowers and set the table so that the servants could get an early start. Well, she had started to do that—I looked in the dining room a while ago, and saw there were fresh roses and candles on the table, and that she had counted out the flat silver, but it was still in a pile on the sideboard, so it seems fair to assume that the murderer interrupted her at that point.”

He whirled abruptly toward Nancy. “How long would it take to put on a lace cloth, put fresh flowers in a bowl, change the candles in the candelabra and count out the knives and forks and so on?”

Nancy shook her head. “There’s no way of knowing that. How quickly a person works, and how efficiently—she might have stopped to wash her hands after she’d fixed the flowers, and been distracted by other chores; powdered her nose, darned a pair of stockings—gone to the kitchen——”

Mike nodded. “Yes, of course—I didn’t think of that.” He looked dejected for a second, and then his face brightened. “Anyway, she called good-bye to us from the dining room as we started—that was at 8.50, do you remember, Clive?”

Clive Bosworth was still sunk in a lethargy of grief and shock. “I don’t know,” he muttered, “I can’t remember. God! if only I hadn’t gone to that damn wayong—that’s all I can think.”

"Don't torture yourself, old man," the Irishman's long stride carried him to his friend's side. "I don't believe it would have made any difference. Whoever was dastardly enough to kill a defenseless woman would simply have bided his time until the first moment he found her alone." Clive shuddered, and after a warm, sympathetic grip on the huddled shoulders, Mike returned to his place beside Nancy's chair. "You see what I am driving at, don't you? After we left Lydia spent a few minutes in the dining room, we don't know what else she did, but when Miss Chambers got here around nine-thirty, Lydia was dead and the murderer had gone. Her body was cool, but rigor mortis hadn't set in, so she had been dead for some few minutes, but not overly long."

Nancy felt guilty. Mike Sullivan was assuming that she had arrived at 9.30, whereas actually it must have been nearer ten o'clock.

Jim Mason voiced a protest, "We don't know that Miss Chambers got here at 9.30," Nancy started, and then relaxed as he went on. "It would all depend upon how long it took the taxi to get here—the storm would have slowed it up."

Would the police question the taxi driver and discover that she had come on the Penang train? Perhaps she could shift the trend of the detestable Irishman's thoughts. "I didn't come right in, you know. I stayed on the veranda a long time trying to get up my courage, and then it took quite a while to find the candles and light them."

Mike waved away her explanation, "It would seem a long time to you, but it was probably only a few minutes, ten at the most." He paused as though struck with a new idea, and his eyes regarded her speculatively. Nancy's gaze leaped fearfully to meet the question she dreaded—if she had discovered Lydia's body even as late as 9.45, what had she been doing in the intervening forty-five minutes that elapsed before the men arrived at 10.30.

Before he could voice the question, if he were actually planning to do so, there was the sound of a car on the driveway outside, and automatically every one stiffened to attention.

"It's not the police," Bill Pearson exclaimed. "It's the Harvys. I forgot all about them, but there's no mistaking Betty's voice." Light footsteps, followed by heavier ones, crossed the veranda, and a blonde, fluffy woman wrapped in a fur-collared evening coat appeared in the hall. "So sorry to be late, Lydia dear," she trilled. "But the car wouldn't start—water in its something or other, and I simply refused to spoil my new silver sandals by slopping through the mud." She looked remarkably pretty poised in the doorway, shaking raindrops from her curly golden head and glancing from under long darkened lashes and pruned eyebrows at the group of men who had moved forward to meet her.

Towering behind her, almost unnoticed, stood her husband, John Harvy, a middle-aged man with shoulders slightly stooped, a brown, close-clipped moustache,

and friendly eyes set deep in a lined brown face. "Where's Lydia and Clive?" he asked matter-of-factly, his words booming through his wife's chatter.

For a second no one spoke, and then Mike said gently, "I'm afraid you are in for a bad shock, Harvy. Lydia has been killed." The group around the door shifted, and the Harvys had a clear view of the brightly lighted living room and the shrouded figure on the couch. Betty smothered a little scream against her husband's white coat sleeve as he pushed past her.

"What happened?" Harvy asked bluntly.

"She was murdered," David Farnsworth exclaimed quickly, as though fearful that some one else would break the news first. "Stabbed!"

"My God!" Harvy ejaculated. His wife broke into hysterical weeping and mechanically he patted her shoulder, "Take me home, John, take me away. I don't want to see her," she moaned.

"You don't have to, Betty." Dave moved to her side. "Come in the dining room with me, and I'll get you a bracer."

"No, no," she pushed him away, "I must speak to Clive." Hurriedly she dabbed her eyes with a flimsy chiffon handkerchief, and with her gaze carefully averted from the motionless figure on the couch, made a circle which brought her to the far side of the man who was still sitting motionless in his chair. "Clive, Clive— It's terrible, but you must not give way like this," she took

hold of his limp hand and pressed it between both of hers. "You must brace up, not sit here brooding——"

"Who did it?" John Harvy was asking in a shocked voice. "Not one of the servants?" He ignored Mike Sullivan, and addressed his question to Bill Pearson.

"I don't know, sir," Bill replied. "The servants all seem to have alibis. Sullivan talked to them." Bill Pearson was the only man in the room, Nancy thought, who didn't seem to be antagonistic to the Irishman. Was it because he was the only person who didn't have something to hide, or was he trying to curry favor? The room seemed full of undercurrents of distrust and animosity, and instead of Lydia's murder drawing them together in a common bond of sorrow and indignation, her death had apparently unleashed all kinds of ugly emotions. She didn't like any of them, except perhaps Jim Mason who had tried to be kind. Mike Sullivan was an officious bully; that young Farnsworth was a fool—look at the way he was hanging around Mrs. Harvy, like a dog drooling for a bone. Clive Bosworth's grief was too theatrical, too abject; if he was anything of a man, he would keep his feelings to himself and take charge of the situation instead of weakly sitting back and letting the Irishman do his job for him. Bill Pearson was so extraordinarily good looking that there must be something wrong with him. No, she decided, there was no one in that room that she'd trust around the corner of a glass house; and yet they were the people she would have to be asso-

ciated with if she stayed here—and now she would have no alternative about that. Even if she had another place to go, the police would insist upon her staying around for a time, anyway; she'd like to see Lydia's murderer caught and punished.

Her reverie was interrupted by Jim Mason's appearance at her side, "Our manners have all gone to the dogs, I'm afraid, Miss Chambers. No one thought to introduce the assistant manager, Mr. Harvy, and his wife to you."

John Harvy came forward, and acknowledged Jim's introduction with a warm, friendly handshake that somehow matched the expression in his deepset grey eyes. "Betty, my dear," he said in a loud voice, "you must come and meet Lydia's friend, Miss Chambers. She has had a tragic time of it."

Reluctantly his wife turned and crossed the room with a cold, appraising feminine look that raked Nancy from the top of her ruffled head to the toes of her muddy white brogues. "How do you do?" she asked in a remote little voice. "I didn't know that Lydia was expecting you today."

Nancy forced a polite smile. "My plans were uncertain. Lydia told me to come whenever I could, so I just descended upon her at the first opportunity."

"Oh, yes," Betty murmured vaguely. "You're an actress, aren't you?" And then as though she had disposed finally of Nancy and her erratic behavior, she returned once more to Clive. He was sitting up straighter now, as

though Betty's low, urgent conversation had given him strength.

John Harvy's face seemed to furrow into deeper lines at his wife's rudeness, and ponderously he tried to excuse her. "Betty is very much upset—she and Lydia saw a lot of each other—the only white women on the estate, of course. It will mean a lot to her, when she gets over the shock, to have you here."

Yes, Nancy thought derisively, just about as much as Lydia meant to her. If that little cat isn't out to get Clive Bosworth, I miss my guess—and Lydia not dead three hours. Almost as though he had read her thoughts, John Harvy went on, "We saw a great deal more of Clive, of course, than we did of Lydia. He practically lived at our house while Lydia was home." Nancy nodded as though she accepted his awkward explanations—she was sorry for him.

To their mutual relief, the necessity for further conversation was eliminated by the arrival of the police car and the heavy tramp of feet entering the house. There was a feeling of strained expectancy in the room, a nervous shifting of position and a sudden silence as a stocky, square-jawed, red-faced man in a khaki uniform appeared in the hall, his usually jovial expression constrained into one of gravity. He spoke quietly, in a deep voice to the men who had gone forward to meet him; John Harvy, Bill Pearson and Jim Mason, and then moved into the living room. For a moment he stood by the doorway, his

small, intelligent dark eyes surveying the scene, the shrouded figure on the couch, the grief-stricken husband sitting close by, Betty Harvy standing beside him and David Farnsworth restlessly shifting his feet as he edged away; Nancy sitting forlornly on the long Singapore chair, her blue suit rumpled and stained; Mike Sullivan turning to nod a greeting to the officer.

Betty Harvy stooped to murmur something into Clive's ear as the policeman came slowly toward them, and with a visible effort Bosworth stumbled to his feet. It was the first time Nancy had had a clear view of him, and much as she hated to admit it, there was something very appealing about his hollow eyes, his high-bred features, and the boyish mop of light disheveled hair.

"I'm sorry, Clive. This is a damnable thing!" the officer's big hand closed warmly over the Englishman's.

"Thanks, Joe," he said, and then added helplessly, "I can't understand it! Who would want to harm Lydia?—she was such a good sort, too good to everybody!" His voice choked, and then with an effort he said, "It's pretty well done me in. Mike will tell you what happened—he'll give you any help you need."

McCleary nodded. "I brought Doc Sparkes along with me. He'll want to get on with his examination, and I'd like to go over this room. Could you people adjourn somewhere—the dining room, perhaps?"

"No, not there." Betty Harvy's voice was shrill— "It's

the way Lydia left it, partly fixed for the supper party she was having—it would be too ghastly to sit there watching those flowers and candles. We'd all rather sit out on the veranda, wet as it is."

The officer shrugged. "Just as you like, so long as this room is cleared." There was a concerted movement toward the hall, and a tall, elderly man with a grey moustache, gold-rimmed spectacles and tired shoulders, broke off his conversation with Bill Pearson and picking up the little black satchel beside him, moved with professional deliberation toward the couch. His matter-of-fact action hastened the exodus, as though each person present dreaded to see the sheet drawn back from that quiet form.

As soon as the room was empty, Doctor Sparkes pulled the covering away from the still figure, and he and McCleary stared down at the helpless form of the murdered woman. The living room was very quiet, but from the veranda came the sound of scraping chairs, creaking rattan, and the subdued murmur of voices. "God!" muttered the officer, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand. "What a shame! She was a fine woman. Who would have thought a thing like this would happen."

The doctor grunted. His gentle fingers were already busy. McCleary turned away. "With eight or nine people milling around all over the place, I don't suppose I will find much, but I'd better get on with the job."

"Any sign of the weapon, Doc, now that you've moved

her?" he asked hopefully a few minutes later. "If she had stabbed herself, it would simplify things for everybody."

"No," Doctor Sparkes replied. "And you'd better get the idea of suicide out of your mind. Start looking for a dagger, or a stiletto—something with a six-inch blade, sharp as a razor on both edges. She couldn't have killed herself."

Quickly and efficiently Joe McCleary began his systematic search, dividing the room into sections and painstakingly examining each article of furniture, shaking out cushions and chair seats, fingering the intricacies of wicker and rattan, lifting down etchings and hunting prints from the white walls, and then, dropping down on all fours to search the yellow wood floor and rugs. Not until he completed a painful circle of the room, and once more reached the couch, did he emit a grunt of satisfaction. His blunt fingers moved over some dark drops on the deep blue Chinese rug. The spots were still damp, and his fingers, as he held them up to the light, had a reddish brown smear.

"She must have been standing here when she was stabbed," he announced. "Does that jibe with what you've found?" He glanced up at the doctor who was once more drawing a sheet across the body.

"Yes, I should say so. She must have been standing near the couch. The weapon entered the body in the center of the cardiac region, avoided the sternum bone,

pierced the pericardial septum—that's the membrane separating the pericardium from the main body cavity, penetrated the fibrous layer of the pericardium, then the inner layer, and finally the anterior tip of the heart where the great blood vessels are. Quite a bit of the yellow pericardial fluid was spilled and there was a large quantity of blood which soaked through her clothes and into the couch. She's been dead between two and four hours—can't tell closer until after the autopsy."

"Don't expect me to remember all your dictionary words, Doc. You can put them in your report. It's enough for me that she was stabbed in the lower part of the heart," McCleary said, standing up and brushing off the dust he had acquired in his progress around the room. "She was killed instantly?"

"Oh, yes. I should say the murderer caught her after the blow and slung her onto the couch—otherwise there would be a lot of blood on the floor, instead of just a few drops." The doctor paused, and then added, "From the downward direction of the wound, she was probably killed by some one several inches taller than she. It might have been done by a big, strong woman, or even a tall one who was angry enough to make the wound."

"That doesn't help me much," McCleary grumbled. "Mrs. Bosworth was surprisingly small—always gave the impression that she was a lot taller than five feet two. Almost everybody is taller than that, even the Malays."

The doctor was staring at McCleary with a somber expression in his eyes, "Mrs. Bosworth was small, but she was very lithe and wiry, and her muscles are strong. Strange she didn't put up more of a scrap, don't you think? Strange that she'd let the murderer get so close to her; that she didn't try to run away apparently, or defend herself."

"Good God, Doc—" McCleary gulped, and his red face faded to a pale pink. "That means that the poor thing was killed by some one she trusted. She wouldn't let a native get that close to her, not even her own servants, unless it was her personal maid, and Saidi simply worshipped the ground she walked on."

Doctor Sparkes nodded. "Not a nice thought, Joe—but there it is. You'd better face it now; she was killed by some one she knew well, and that means some one we know too."

"But—Oh, Lord, it's incredible. Why, I know all these chaps. You couldn't find a finer, more upstanding lot of men on any estate. Why, I've hunted with them, drunk with them, played poker with them—and you get to know a chap pretty damned well under those conditions."

The old doctor shrugged. "Well, counting the men out, there are still the women, Mrs. Harvy and the American girl." His expression was solicitous as he watched the dismay on his friend's face. "It's a rotten mess, Joe. The first white murder you've ever had in your district, and

it had to be one of your friends. If I were you, I'd call up Johore Bahru and ask for help. You're too close to all these people—you'll break your heart over this case if you try to crack it alone."

McCleary shook his head. "If one of them killed her, the rest of them will all be with me. They'll be as anxious as I am to uncover the swine."

From the disillusion of seventy years, Doctor Sparkes smiled sadly. "I hope you're right. Tonight should tell the story. Only, remember, Joe, it's human nature to resent a policeman, and practically every one has something or other in his life that he doesn't want dragged out for public exposure." His tone became matter-of-fact. "I suppose you'll be here for some time. Mind if I drive your car back to Kluang? I'll send my sais back with it."

McCleary was once more the official. "Tomorrow will be time enough for that. I'll spend the night here—I've got the servants to question after I've finished with the crowd outside. You'll send for the body, and arrange for an autopsy, won't you?" He glanced again toward the couch, and then said slowly, "We can't leave her there tonight—we'll have to use this room—and besides, in this climate?"

"I was thinking about that," the doctor said. "Is there a room here that is cooler than this?"

McCleary nodded. "Clive's office, downstairs under his bedroom there," he nodded toward the rear wall. "There's an inside stairway from his room, and the office

is concrete. Can you give me a hand, or shall I call one of the other men?"

"I'm not a cripple yet," the doctor snorted. "Wrap her up in the couch cover—and later you can throw a rug over the stains here so as not to upset any of your squeamish friends. Come on—I want to get home."

The veranda, lighted now by orange-shaded lamps, still had a desolate air, despite its occupants. Wisps of mist, aftermath of the storm, drifted past the rusty screens, cicadas shrilled their rasping notes, and a myriad of strange humming, chirping, twittering sounds brought the mysterious menace of the jungle closer. There was a sudden creaking of rattan, an uneasy shifting of position as the doctor and the officer appeared at last in the doorway.

"Now then," McCleary said in a friendly voice, as Doctor Sparkes, with a gruff "Good night," went quickly down the steps. "If some one will just remove the fancy shades from those lamps so that we can have a little light——"

Several of the men, as though eager for action of some sort, jumped to lift off the offending shades. At the resultant glare, the taut, white faces of the little group leaped into haggard relief, all of them nervous, shrinking.

"Bring your chairs a little closer, won't you? So that I can talk to you all at the same time," McCleary asked, pulling out a straight wicker chair and lowering himself into it. He waited until a reluctant semi-circle had been

formed in front of him. It seemed to him that all of their faces looked hard, the eyes wary; hands were clenched on chair arms, or moved restlessly, picking at sharp ends of wicker, feet scraped, long white-trowsered legs crossed and recrossed themselves.

"There's nothing to be nervous about," McCleary began in a calm voice. "This is just a little informal talk among friends who are anxious to discover the person who killed Mrs. Bosworth. I know I can count on all of you to co-operate with me, and that you are just as eager as I am to bring her murderer to justice."

There was a murmur of agreement, but not a face relaxed its guard. "First, I want to ask whether any of you know anything that will throw any light on tonight's tragedy. Did you know of any one who had reason to wish Mrs. Bosworth out of the way?"

Heads shook, glances shifted warily, but no one answered in words. "Well, then, we'll have to approach the problem from another angle," McCleary said, patiently, after an awkward silence. "We'll try to eliminate all those who could not have committed the murder, and in order to do that, we'll have to find out just when Mrs. Bosworth was killed, and just where every one was at that time. I understand that Miss Chambers was the first to discover the crime. Is that right?"

Nancy caught her breath. It was coming now. If only she could keep the secret of her identity. She forced her hazel eyes to meet the officer's direct gaze as she nodded

her bright curly head. "Yes, it was I who found her," she admitted, moistening her dry lips.

The policeman was pulling a shabby notebook from his baggy pocket and opening it on the table in front of him—"Will you tell me, please, in your own words just what happened."

It wasn't until after the second murder that Nancy realized how wrong she had been in every decision she had made that night, that if she had told the whole truth to the officer, Lydia's murderer would have been exposed and two lives would have been saved.

CHAPTER IV

Nancy's low, soft voice was the only sound on the veranda, as she once more told the story of her arrival, her fear of the dark, silent house, her eventual discovery of her friend's body. It was less of an ordeal than she had expected; the officer seemed to be taking down her statement without question, and mercifully in this informal examination, he was concerned primarily, not with Nancy herself, but with the scene of the crime.

"So the house was in complete darkness?" he asked as she finished her tale and leaned back against the damp pillow in her chair. "When did the lights come on?"

"I don't know. I tried them when I went into the house, and found they were out of order. I fainted when the men returned from the wayong, and when I came to, the lights were all ablaze."

"Who turned on the lights?" McCleary's eyes swept the group of men.

"I turned on the hall ones," Jim Mason said, promptly. "Sullivan got ahead of me and caught Miss Chambers as she pitched forward." Nancy turned a startled gaze on Mike's lean profile—she had thought it was Jim who had carried her into the living room.

Mason continued, "Sullivan yelled to me to turn on the light, and they flooded the hall as soon as I touched the button. No one really believed what she said about Lydia's being dead, you see, we were more concerned about Miss Chambers and the state she was in. It wasn't until Sullivan carried her into the living room, and some one switched on the lights there, that we found Lydia."

"I turned on those lights," David Farnsworth volunteered.

The officer glanced at him and nodded. "All right, you can tell me about that later— Where's Hamilton? He'll know about the lights. They're his job, aren't they?"

David Farnsworth, angry at what he regarded as another snub, turned to Betty Harvy, as though seeking sympathy, but she snapped something at him in an irritated whisper, and he slouched moodily back in his chair.

There was an embarrassed silence in response to the policeman's inquiry, and then Bill Pearson said reluctantly, "I'm afraid you won't get much out of him tonight, Joe. I sent one of the Malay boys to fetch him, and the boy found him down at the factory with a couple of empty bottles on the table in front of him. You know what that means—he was dead to the world."

The inspector nodded. "Wasn't he invited to the supper party tonight, Clive?"

Bosworth started at the question, and it was a moment before he seemed to grasp its meaning. "Yes, yes, of

course. Lydia asked everybody. I remember she said it was her first real triumph with him, and that she'd make him like her yet."

The officer seemed to pounce. "Didn't Hamilton like Mrs. Bosworth, then?"

Clive looked bewildered. "No, not much. He hasn't much use for anybody, you know, except Bill Pearson."

"Did he have any special reason for disliking Mrs. Bosworth?" McCleary persisted.

"He thought she pampered the coolies—and that she shouldn't interfere." Clive looked uncomfortable. Bill Pearson was frowning, but it was John Harvy who spoke up. "There was really nothing to it, Joe. Ronald Hamilton wouldn't hurt a fly. You're wasting your time, if you suspect him."

"That may be, but just the same I want to know what the trouble was. If you know about it, suppose you tell me."

John Harvy frowned and shifted his long legs into a more comfortable position. "Hamilton prides himself on his efficiency, and he's been here so long that he knows his labor force inside out. Mrs. Bosworth was a very warm-hearted, impulsive person, always helping somebody, and the natives used to take advantage. Her maid, Saidi, complained that her husband, a Malay named Sidin, who worked in the factory, was very sick, and that Hamilton made him work just the same. Sidin is the sort who always malingers, but instead of explaining that to Lydia

when she spoke to him about the man, Hamilton went off the deep end and told her to mind her own business, and let him mind his. Lydia was quick-tempered too, you know, and she flew back at him. Later, when she told me about the affair, I explained that Sidin was always whining and that Hamilton had had him thoroughly examined by a doctor, so he knew there was nothing wrong. She apologized to Hamilton, but for all his dourness, he's sensitive, and the fact that Lydia had believed him capable of injustice to one of his men rankled. That all happened a year ago, before Lydia took the trip home, so you see it could have had nothing to do with this affair. Ever since she came back, Hamilton has been willing to forget the incident; the fact that he accepted her invitation for tonight showed that. He keeps very much to himself, you know, never goes anywhere."

The policeman looked at Bill Pearson as though for confirmation. "Is that right, Bill? Do you think Hamilton had got over his ill feeling for Mrs. Bosworth? You ought to know, since you live with him."

Bill nodded, and his firm, well-molded lips relaxed into the suspicion of a smile. "Yes indeed. He hasn't a great opinion of women, but he admitted to me last night that Mrs. Bosworth was 'nane th' worrse, as women gae.' High praise for him."

"He was definitely planning to come here tonight?"

"Yes. He was pleased at Lydia's insistence—and flattered because she was having kedgerree especially for him.

He spent an hour telling her just what she mustn't do, in order to have it right."

"Humph!" The officer was clearly skeptical—it looked to him as though Hamilton was the guilty man. "Strange then that he didn't show up, wasn't it?"

"Not if you know Hamilton. He wouldn't leave the factory if there was any danger of the lights going off in the storm. He probably worked like a dog when he found something had gone wrong with them, and then, when they were fixed, took a drink. Once he tastes the stuff, you know, he can't stop."

Betty Harvy, piqued at being so long ignored, and at the interest with which Clive was following the inquiry, leaned forward. "I don't understand all this fuss about the lights being off, Mr. McCleary," she complained in a childish tone. "I was home all evening, and my lights didn't go out."

"What's that?" the officer turned to her sharply.

"I was home all evening, and the lights were on the whole time," she repeated. "I never knew them to go off in one of the houses here without having the whole place plunged in darkness."

"Anybody there with you?" he asked.

"No, I was alone. John went to the wayong with the rest of the men, and the servants all went too, of course."

McCleary grunted. "Any of you other men have trouble with your lights?" He glanced questioningly at Pearson, Mason, and Farnsworth.

They shook their heads, each of them replying that they had been away from their bungalows during the storm and had no way of knowing whether or not their lights had been affected; and of course, the native kampongs weren't wired for electricity.

"Ever know of the lights in just one house going off in a storm, and the others remaining intact?"

There was a silence as though they were reluctant to commit themselves to a statement which would impugn the veracity of either Nancy or Betty. It was Mike who broke the silence. "Perhaps the lights weren't damaged by the storm, but just a fuse blew here. That would explain why this house was dark and the Harvy house had lights."

"If that was the case, then some one must have put in a new fuse, after Miss Chambers got here, and before you arrived; and Miss Chambers is certain that she heard no one."

Nancy looked worried. The lights really had been out—so either Mrs. Harvy was deliberately lying in order to discredit her—or "Where is the fuse box, please?" she asked.

"In the rear of the hall, near the back door," Mike said.

"Then, I am sure no one could have touched it while I was here alone," Nancy said positively. "My ears were strained for any sound, and I spent most of my time in the hall. No one could have opened a door, and put in a fuse without my hearing him. Whoever it was, should

have had to have a light, and I would have seen the reflection on the ceiling. It's impossible." Her gaze shifted from the officer to Mrs. Harvy, whose eyes refused to meet the challenge.

"We'll check all that later, when Hamilton is available," McCleary said. "That can wait, but I don't want to keep you people up longer than I have to, so we'll get on with your stories. I'll finish with the ladies first. Mrs. Harvy," Betty jumped as she realized he was addressing her, and her blue eyes opened wide, "where were you this evening, and what were you doing?"

"I was home reading," she said virtuously. "The English mail had come in and I had lots of papers and magazines to keep me busy. Time went so fast that I didn't know how late it was until John came back. Then we had trouble starting the car and didn't get here until last."

"You were alone all evening?"

"Yes, I told you that," her tone was bored. "I let the servants off early. I think it's a mistake to spoil them, but Lydia let hers go, and she persuaded every one else. She had awfully radical ideas—I think she would have approved of a forty-hour week for the whole plantation."

"You didn't go out? Didn't run down here to help Mrs. Bosworth in her preparations for supper?"

Betty shook her head. "No, I didn't move from the house. I knew if I had come, I'd just have been in the way. Lydia was so appallingly efficient, and such a scrumptious cook that she wouldn't have wanted me

around. I did wish that I was up there though when the storm broke—I'm terrified of lightning—and I never saw such a storm, why——”

McCleary, who had been making a few notes in his looseleaf notebook, looked up impatiently. “Yes, yes—it was too bad—that will be all for the present, Mrs. Harvy.” There was a faint smile on Betty's red rosebudded mouth as she settled back, which vanished as the officer spoke to the man beside her.

“Clive, when did you last see Mrs. Bosworth alive?”

The young Englishman jerked up in his chair. “I don't know, exactly. What time did you say it was, Mike, when we started for the wayout?”

“I asked you, Clive,” the officer cut in. “I'll talk to Mike later. Where was Mrs. Bosworth when you left?”

“In the hall. I stopped to ask her if she was sure she didn't mind our going. She laughed and said she was glad to get us out from under foot because she had a lot of things to do.”

“What did she mean by that?”

“Oh, the usual things, I guess—fix up the table, empty ashtrays, and get dressed—the usual rigamarole a woman goes through before a party. She was in the dining room bustling around as we went down the steps, for she called ‘Good-by’ to us out of the window.” Clive's face was very pale, and his hands fidgeted on the arm of the chair, but he spoke composedly.

“I see. What did you do for the rest of the evening?”

"I was at the wayong," Clive sounded surprised. "We all were, you know."

"Yes, yes, I know that," the officer's tone was patient. "But I want to know who you were with, who you saw, what you did. Did you leave the wayong at all? Did you come back to the house?"

Clive seemed bewildered by the cascade of questions, at any rate his expression changed suddenly, Nancy thought, and his answers came slowly.

"I walked down to the show with Mike. The natives had benches reserved for us right up in front, and we sat there. It was pretty dark inside—just those stinkin' little oil lamps. I saw all the rest of the chaps at one time or another. Let's see, Bill sat near us, and Dave did too. John came in late and had a seat at the back. I don't know where Jim sat, but he was there, for I ran into him once during the evening when I went outside to get a whiff of air."

"You didn't go back to the house at all?"

"No, not until later. We passed the word around when we'd stuck it as long as we could, and we all decamped together, a few minutes after the servants left. Those wayongs go on into the night, and Lydia was having supper at eleven."

McCleary stared at him as though about to ask more questions, and then stifling a sigh, said, "Well, that's all for now." With an air of relief, Clive relaxed into his chair as the officer addressed Bill Pearson. "Give me a

résumé of your evening, Bill. You know the sort of thing I want."

Bill leaned forward. "I was busy finishing some letters that I wanted to go out in tomorrow's mail, and I didn't get down to the wayong until a little after nine. My boy had a chair for me, and as I sat down I noticed Bosworth and Sullivan were there. During one of the intermissions I went over and talked to them, and wandered about a bit. It was frightfully stuffy inside, and my seat was too near the orchestra for comfort. I was glad when Sullivan gave me the high sign to leave."

"You didn't go up to the house for anything?"

"No, sir."

"When did you last see Mrs. Bosworth alive?"

"This afternoon, about four-thirty. She was apparently taking a walk, for she was a mile from the house and cutting across the corner of my division. I thought she might have a message for me, and I shouted, but she shook her head and just waved her hand."

"You didn't speak to her then?"

"No, she was too far away. I just happened to notice her, that was all."

McCleary frowned. "Did you ever see her there before? Was it usual for her to wander around the estate alone?"

"I never saw her so far from the house, or in that particular place alone, but she was a very active person and interested in everything about the estate."

McCleary turned to Clive. "Was there any significance in Mrs. Bosworth's being out there this afternoon? Did she say anything to you about it before or afterwards?"

Clive shook his head. "Not that I know of. She took a walk almost every day, but usually she'd stick to the tracks. I don't know why she'd be going in that direction except that she might have been looking for new specimens for her wild garden—flowers and ferns."

"She'd hardly find anything suitable in the cleared ground, would she?"

"No, but between Pearson's division and Mason's, there was a neck of jungle, and I told her at tiffin that Harvy thought we ought to clear that out; that our production had been falling off and we ought to plant more rubber. That might have reminded her of the place and decided her to look around before it was burnt over."

The officer frowned—it sounded screwy to him for a white woman to go for a stroll in the jungle. She must have known she was apt to meet snakes or a tiger, or God knows what—and yet her husband and her friends didn't seem to think it strange. If she'd been the flirtatious type like Mrs. Harvy, he would have suspected a rendezvous. No doubt it was a trifling matter, but it worried him.

"And Mrs. Bosworth didn't mention her walk to you at teatime, Clive?" he persisted.

Clive flushed. "I didn't come home for tea. I cut work early so that Mike and I could drive over to Batu Pahat. He'd heard there was a man-eating tiger in the district,

and that they were organizing a hunt. When we got there, though, we found it was just a yarn, there was no tiger at all, so we had a few beers and came back. Didn't get here until around eight, and Lydia ticked me off because we missed the early dinner she had planned. It was just a snack because of the supper party later. She never mentioned her walk. I'd have told her I was going to Batu Pahat, of course, but I just didn't think—Mike said 'Can you give the jolly old job a miss this afternoon? I'd like to get in on that tiger hunt up around Batu Pahat—it's coming off in a day or so, I heard!' That was all I needed to know. We were in the car and away."

The other rubber men glowered at Mike Sullivan, and even the officer looked disapproving, but, though Mike's smile was mocking, he said nothing.

Clive looked distressed belatedly at his thoughtlessness. "I ought to have told Lydia—I was always a rotten husband."

McCleary turned to Mason.

"It's your turn now, Jim."

Jim straightened in his chair beside Nancy and leaned forward. "I went to Kluang this afternoon to see a shipment of rubber off, and was held up there at the Rest House talking to a gang of roughnecks." He grinned at the officer, who smiled faintly in return. "Yes, I remember that session, but you left after I did, so carry on from that point."

"Well, my drinking today was very conservative. I had only three beers, so I was perfectly *compos mentis* when I left the Rest House, as every one there will tell you; it elicited surprise rather than admiration. I collected the supplies I had ordered earlier, and started home, but my radiator began to boil soon after I left town, and I had to stop at every stream I came to, to put in fresh water. I couldn't figure out what was wrong with the blasted thing, spent a lot of time fussing over it, and then it occurred to me that my fan belt might be greasy and not letting in the cool air. It was pitch dark by then, of course, so I had to use my flashlight to get it off, and then I didn't make much headway cleaning it, so I rubbed some dust on it, and just hoped it would carry me home. As I passed the kampong, I saw the wayong had started, but I had to clean up so I went along to my place. Farnsworth had already left, so I hurried into a fresh suit and set out again. I saw the storm was apt to break any minute, and as a matter of fact I only beat it by about thirty seconds. I met Bosworth outside the door, and I told him my adventures."

"That's right, by Jove, you did!" Clive exclaimed. "I'd forgotten. He told me about his fan belt, and I said he'd better have his kabun rub it with kerosene." His thin, pale face brightened at the memory of his advice. "Best thing in the world——"

"When did you last see Mrs. Bosworth?" the officer interrupted, looking up from his notebook.

"Last night," Jim said. "I walked down to the house with Clive, and she suggested that I come in and have a whisky soda with him. I mentioned that I was going into town today, and she asked me whether I'd mind getting her some stuff. She made out a list." His voice held a queer, regretful note as he added, "the things are still in my car."

Nancy shivered—poor Lydia making out a list of things she would never have occasion now to use.

"Harvy!" McCleary's voice sounded loud and abrupt in the silence which had been filled with the thought of Lydia's last hours of life. "How did you spend the evening, and when did you last see Mrs. Bosworth alive?"

John Harvy's face looked old and sad. "I saw her at nine o'clock, or a bit after."

There was a sudden, surprised shifting and creaking of chairs as every one turned to look at him, and the air was tense with excitement. Even McCleary's stubby pencil ceased to scratch. "Go on," the officer exclaimed tersely.

"I stopped by to see whether Clive had left. I had some things to talk over with him; a sudden idea as to why our production had dropped off; but that isn't what you want to hear, is it?" He passed a hand across his brow as though to smooth out the deep lines of his frown. "I didn't go inside. I just called from the driveway, and Lydia answered me. She was in the dining room and came to that window—" He pointed toward the window facing them, and automatically every one glanced up as though ex-

pecting to see Lydia there. "She said that Clive and Mike had left ten or fifteen minutes before, so I went on. I sat in the back at the wayong, which upset the natives—they had saved a place of honor for me down beside Clive and Sullivan. I was very tired, and I knew I couldn't stand being so near the gamelons. I'm afraid I didn't pay much attention to the wayong, I was too absorbed in my own thoughts; and I had lost all track of time when Dave tapped me on the shoulder and said it was time to go."

"You didn't go into this house at all, Harvy?"

"No, just hallooed for Clive from the driveway."

"Did Mrs. Bosworth seem worried? Did she seem to be alone?"

"So far as I know. I had heard her singing as I approached—singing the way one does when one is alone. And she seemed cheerful enough when she spoke. Her back was to the lighted room, and there was the screened porch between us, so I couldn't see her face, but there was nothing different in my impression of her."

"You didn't have any reason to dislike Mrs. Bosworth, or to fear her, did you, Harvy?" The officer's gimlet eyes bored into the lanky planter.

"God, no!" Harvy nearly leaped from his chair in his surprise.

McCleary leaned back, twisting the pencil in his blunt, hairy fingers. He was discouraged at the progress he was making. Every lead seemed to peter out. That was the worst of dealing with white men—friends. Give him a nice

straightforward native killing, or a gang robbery, and he'd know where he was at. Wearily he turned to David Farnsworth. "Make your story as brief as you can, Dave, will you? It's getting late, and there's a lot to be done yet."

Young Farnsworth, who had been anticipating his questioning with a morbid eagerness, looked sulky at the request. He was always being pushed aside as though nothing he could do or say was of any importance. Betty Harvy was the only one on the estate who treated him like a man, and now Betty had dished him. The nips he had taken from the brandy bottle gave him courage—he'd show them how they'd underestimated him; that he wasn't the dumb cluck they thought him——

From across the sluggish, alligator-infested Sungei Seng-brong River that formed the western boundary of the estate, came a snarling, blood-chilling AAUM! Terrified, Nancy grabbed Jim Mason's arm. "What's that?" she gasped.

"Just a tiger," he said matter-of-factly, without turning his head. His eyes, bright with excitement, were watching David Farnsworth stumble to his feet.

"I'm not going to keep quiet any longer," he squealed in a shrill, defiant voice. "You're all scared to tell what you know, but I'm not. To hell with all of you! I know who killed Lydia, and I'm going to tell."

CHAPTER V

There was a stunned silence on the veranda as young Farnsworth paused to get the full flavor of the sensation he had caused. Every eye was fixed on him, every one was tense, either with interest or fear, even the officer edged forward expectantly on his chair.

"I don't care if it does cost me my job," Dave blustered, clenching his trembling hands. "It was Bosworth who killed Lydia, the Tuan Besar himself!"

"Shut up, you drunken fool!" Mike Sullivan jumped to his feet. "You don't know what you're saying."

"Oh, yes, I do," Dave sneered. "I know why you want to shut me up too. Because you helped him. You hated Lydia because she didn't want you sponging on Clive, dragging him away from his work."

"Go back and sit down, Sullivan," the officer snapped as the Irishman, eyes blazing, plunged toward his accuser. Arrested by the tone of authority, Mike stopped. "You don't expect me to take that sort of talk and not do anything about it, do you?" he demanded, glaring from the policeman to Dave.

"I expect you to sit down, Sullivan. You'll have a chance to answer the accusations. This is an inquiry into

murder, not a private feud. SIT DOWN!" McCleary's voice rose to a roar. Reluctantly, the Irishman dropped back into his seat.

"Now, Farnsworth," the officer said sternly, "you have made accusations against two people. What foundation have you?"

"I know Clive was fed up with Lydia and the way she tried to keep his nose to the grindstone. I know he was away from the wayong for half an hour, because I saw him sneak out and go up the road. I timed him because—well, I had my own reasons." Dave hesitated, his facts didn't sound very convincing as he put them into words. "He lied about that, didn't he? Look at him! Let him tell you where he was if he hasn't anything to hide!" Clive had shrunk back in his chair and was staring helplessly at his accuser.

Betty nudged him. "Speak up, Clive. Tell the little worm where you were. You just went out to watch the storm, didn't you?"

"There, you see! She's telling him what to say!" David shrieked. "She's the real motive for Lydia's murder. He killed his wife so that he could marry Betty."

"That's enough, Farnsworth!" John Harvy was on his feet. "You leave my wife out of this."

"Your wife," David sneered. "Why don't you look after her then, not let her make a fool of herself over every man on the place? It would suit you down to the ground to be rid of her. If she and Clive cleared out, you'd be

manager—that's what you're hoping for. You've always hated Clive, and you knew he wouldn't have lasted here two months if it hadn't been for Lydia."

John Harvy's face was white with rage, and his voice choked as he turned fiercely on the officer. "Either you will make this drunken fool shut up, McCleary, or I will."

The officer nodded. "That will do, Farnsworth. I want facts, not mudslinging."

"Mudslinging! Oh, my God! I've told you who committed the murder and you call it mudslinging!" David yelled. "It's a conspiracy, that's what it is. You all want to cover up the scandal, but you won't get away with it!" Beside himself with rage, Farnsworth whirled around to face his muttering associates. "I know plenty about all of you. Where's that fancy little Malay kris, Mason? The one Lydia admired at your cocktail party. Just the thing to stick into a defenseless woman!" Jim Mason's face whitened beneath his freckles and he checked an exclamation.

David was glaring at Bill Pearson now. "You, Pearson, with your pretty face—I saw Lydia weeping on your shoulder and you trying to shake her off, shut her up when you saw me coming. Why don't you tell about that?"

McCleary jumped to his feet with a shout, but he was too late. Bill Pearson's left arm shot out as he leaped forward, and his fist caught the point of David's chin. There was a wild scramble and shouts of approval as

Farnsworth slumped to the floor. McCleary, white with rage, pushed Bill aside and stooped over the inert form—"Get away, Pearson—I'll settle with you later," he roared as Bill, ashamed of his outburst of temper, tried to lift Dave's body. "Mason, take hold of the boy's feet and help me carry him inside. The rest of you stay right where you are."

Jim Mason returned in a few minutes, a grin on his homely, round face. "You certainly landed a pippin," he said to Bill. "He's just come out of it."

"What's he saying now?" Betty Harvy asked anxiously.

"Nothing much. As soon as he came to, McCleary chased me out. Clive's kabun is on guard outside the bedroom door."

"I shouldn't have lost my temper," Bill said. "He was drunk and wasn't responsible for what he said, but it made me see red when he implied that Lydia, that I—" Pearson turned to Clive. "There wasn't anything to his insinuations, you know—" Clive was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to do more than nod indifferently.

"He certainly said plenty," Jim agreed. "I hope to God I can find that damned kris of mine, or I'll be talking to you from behind bars." Despite his levity Mason was obviously worried. "Can't for the life of me remember seeing that kris lately either."

"What's Mr. McCleary doing?" Betty asked in a strained voice.

"He's telephoning to Johore. He's in a frightful tem-

per. Didn't know good old Joe could get so mad. The less we see of him in his present state of mind, the better off we'll be."

As though in answer to the words, the officer appeared in the doorway, his face a grim red mask, and his voice, devoid of all friendliness, was harsh as he said, "In view of what has happened, I will have to keep you all here for the present."

"Why? What for?—" questions crackled in the sultry air.

"Because you've all lied to me; because I'm not getting co-operation from any one; because Farnsworth was attacked when he tried to give me information. I've tried to play cricket with you, but it's impossible. A man is coming up from Johore to take over the investigation, and he wants every one kept here until he arrives."

"Who's coming? Any one we know?" Mike Sullivan asked, an undertone of anxiety in the voice he tried to keep casual.

McCleary, who had started to turn away, stared at him with hard eyes. "Sergeant Ismael will take charge. He is leaving at once."

"Ismael!" Betty Harvy sniffed. "Sounds like a native."

Without deigning to reply, McCleary vanished indoors, but Mike Sullivan, with a worried expression in his cat-green eyes, said slowly, "He is a native—and one of the smartest detectives in the East. God damn Farnsworth!"

"Well, I don't care about any native." Betty's voice

was petulant. "I'm going home. Come on, John!" She rose imperiously, gathering her coat about her.

"Sit down, Betty!" her husband commanded. "There's no use drawing any more attention to yourself than you already have. I don't know whether McCleary has any right to keep us here, but I think we'd be fools to antagonize him any more than we have done."

Bill Pearson, who had moved quietly toward the steps, halted. "I suppose McCleary wants a chance to search our bungalows!" He sounded disturbed, and his hand reached for the doorknob, as though in defiance of the officer's command, he was about to hurry away. Then, changing his mind, he turned slowly and went back to his chair.

Nancy, who had been watching and listening with the detached interest of a person who knew she was living in a nightmare, and with the dim assurance that she would eventually wake up safe in her own bed, became suddenly aware of her own danger. McCleary had been gentle with her, interested only in what had happened in the house since her arrival, but she couldn't hope for such an attitude on the part of another detective. He would want to know all kinds of personal things about her, would tangle her with questions to which she knew no answer. Where had Helene Chambers come from? what was she doing in the East? what were the names of the plays in which she had appeared? Lydia probably had letters from Helene with which the police could check Nancy's random re-

plies. Was there a chance that Nancy could get hold of the letters first so that she would know more about the girl she was impersonating? She almost wished she had told the truth in the beginning—and yet, how could she expect any one to believe in her after they knew what had happened in Penang?

With an effort she controlled her rising panic. She was Helene Chambers, a hard-boiled actress from New York—not a frightened little librarian from a small New England village. She ought to act her part better, look it too. Thus far, fortunately every one had been too overwrought, too concerned with their own affairs to pay much attention to her—but at any moment one of them might notice incongruities, and certainly the strange detective would take nothing for granted.

It was lucky she hadn't had her baggage marked with her initials, and that she had had the presence of mind to scrape off all the labels before she fled from Penang. At that point, her complacency received a shock. Had she put her letters in the trunk which she had checked at the steamship office in Penang, or were they in her suitcase? She couldn't remember. If they were in her suitcase, she'd have to destroy them before the police began to search, and above all, she must get rid of those telegrams. She glanced around the group on the veranda with a calculating eye; who could help her?

Impulsively, Nancy rose and made her way across the semi-circle, until she stood in front of Clive. "Mr. Bos-

worth," her tone was apologetic, "I'm sorry to be a nuisance, but I wonder whether there is some place where I could change these damp clothes?" Her eyes were wide and appealing. "I'm chilled through, and it looks as though we'd have to be out here indefinitely?"

Clive looked up dazed, and for a second he blinked as though trying to remember who she was and why she was there. Then he was on his feet, the well-bred English host. "Of course, Miss Chambers. *A'fully* sorry to have been so remiss. Forgotten all my manners. I fancy Lydia has a room fixed for you— Boy!" He raised his voice to a shout. Nancy drew a sharp breath of relief. Betty Harvy shifted her head to stare at the washed-out, insignificant girl who had suddenly asserted herself, and Mike Sullivan's face lighted into a grin. It had taken the Chambers wench to arouse Clive to his responsibilities—the old die-hard English hospitality would pull the poor chap out of his depression yet, with luck.

A scared Malay boy in a white coat and brilliant hued sarong hurried onto the veranda. "Take these bags along to the Mem's room," Clive said in singsong Malay, and then to McCleary, who had appeared in the doorway, "Miss Chambers must change her wet clothes—been sittin' around in them for hours."

The officer's glance was skeptical as he met Clive's steady blue gaze, but the picture Nancy made, forlorn and drooping, capped by a well-timed shiver, made him capitulate. "All right, she can go in."

"I'll show her to her room—want to be sure it's all right," Clive said calmly, motioning Nancy to follow the Malay boy whose bare feet were padding along the hall as he balanced the suitcase and hatbox on his head.

McCleary was taken aback by Clive's sudden assertiveness. "Keep out of the other rooms. Farnsworth is in your bedroom and I don't want him disturbed, nor anything in the place. And see that you come right back."

"That's quite all right," Clive nodded. "I'll take Miss Chambers along to her room, but I want to speak to the cookie too. Time we all had something to eat and drink if we have to make a night of it. I ought to have spoken to the servants before this, the poor beggars are probably quite demoralized."

The officer frowned. "I don't want you talking to the servants. Tell the boy there to order supper, if you want to, but it'll have to be served on the porch. I expect to use the dining room."

Clive shrugged, and his expression was sardonic. "I'll take Miss Chambers to her room, and then you can come along and hear what I tell the boy, if that would make you feel better. My only desire is to see that my guests are provided for."

McCleary grunted, "Good!" but he watched Clive's tall figure moving easily down the hall behind the girl, with a puzzled expression. What the deuce had come over the bugger?

Unconscious, apparently, of McCleary's straining ears

and suspicious gaze, the Englishman was saying to Nancy in a pleasant voice, "You know where the living room and dining room are." He motioned his head backward without glancing at either door. "This one next to the living room is ours, er, mine. Farnsworth is in there recuperating." He gave a friendly, reassuring nod to a young Malay boy who had risen from the floor outside the door. "McCleary has pressed my kabun—gardener—into service as guard, I see. The room opposite is Mike's—he's here so much that he leaves a lot of his barang, er, baggage, guns and whatnot, you know, so he doesn't have to pack them with him when he comes. The room next to his, second door below the dining room, is the guest room. I fancy Lydia has it ready for you." He peered rather helplessly into the rose-lit room where the young Malay was painstakingly unstrapping Nancy's hatbox and suitcase. "Looks all right, but I don't know much about that sort of thing. I'll send Saidi, Lydia's maid, along to help you."

"Oh, no, please don't," Nancy said quickly. "I'm sure everything is all right. See? there are even fresh flowers on the dressing table and on the bedside table. I'd rather do things for myself. I'm not used to a maid, and I don't know enough Malay to direct her."

"Well—" he turned away. "The guest bath is next to yours—you and Mike can share that—or better yet, you can have that to yourself and he can use mine." He rubbed a hand across his forehead impatiently. "I can't

adjust myself to Lydia's—" With an effort he controlled his feelings and went on. "The door at the end of the hall opens out on the rear veranda. Steps go down to a covered passage leading out to the kitchen and servants' quarters. I'll have the boy tell Saidi to put hot water and towels in the bathroom for you, and if you need anything else, just shout." He smiled vaguely down at her, and calling to the boy, strode back along the hall.

Poor Lydia had done her best to make the room attractive, Nancy thought, as she locked the door behind her, but the chintz curtains at the window hung limp and faded, and the heavy fragrance of the jasmine and passion flowers didn't quite drown the smell of mildew. The big bed, shrouded with mosquito netting, and the huge dark wood wardrobe, constant reminders of the tropics, dominated the whole place and somehow made the cushioned wicker chairs and well-equipped, taffeta-petticoated dressing table seem like frivolous intruders. Moths fluttered across the whitewashed ceilings and hurled themselves suicidally against the rose-shaded lights until their singed bodies dropped on the table. Mosquitoes buzzed voraciously around her head, and the dank air sifting through the partially closed slats of the shutters seemed a direct message of warning from the fever-infested jungle.

Half an hour later Nancy nodded approval of the transformed figure reflected from her mirror. Her bronze hair had been piled high in a mass of careful curls, bright

rouge enhanced the depth and color of her eyes, lipstick brought out the tender humorous lines of her mouth, and the long, soft drapery of a yellow chiffon frock gave her slender figure added height and dignity.

There was no trace left of Nancy Reynolds, not a scrap of paper in her baggage nor a familiar look or smell about her person, for she had used the powders and perfumes which were part of the furnishings of the dressing table. For better or worse, now, Nancy thought, she was Helene Chambers—mercifully unaware at the moment that the real Helene was a petite brunette with the amusing vocabulary of a street gamin.

Nancy turned from the mirror, and with the dramatic gesture decided upon to initiate herself in her new rôle, threw open her bedroom door. Resentfully it hurled itself back against the flimsy wall with a reverberating bang, and almost simultaneously a shriek of mortal terror echoed through the house.

For a second Nancy cowered back too horrified to move, but something in the sheer terror of the cry still echoing in her ears impelled her across the hall to the door which a dazed Malay boy was still guarding. The scream had come from there, but her limited knowledge of the language was a barrier between her and the suspicious kabun.

McCleary was suddenly beside her. "What's the matter? Did you cry out?"

Nancy shook her head. "Not I. I am sure it was Mr.

Farnsworth. I was just coming out of my room, and the sound came from here.”

McCleary threw open the door, and cursed under his breath as he floundered for a light. Behind him the kabun was importantly denying entrance to the excited white people who had crowded into the hall. Nancy, however, with heavy beating heart had crept into the room behind McCleary, and stood just inside the door, shivering in the damp breeze that blew in from the windows. As the light flashed on, it was Nancy who first saw that the bed was empty, the sheets impatiently entwined with the open mosquito netting; and it was Nancy, emboldened by the light and the obviously deserted room, who discovered the blood marks on the white window sill below the desolately swinging shutters.

CHAPTER VI

Two hours later a squat, brown-faced Malay, smartly clad in a khaki uniform, alighted from a mud-spattered car and mounted the steps of the vine-festooned bungalow. McCleary, who for the last half hour had been pacing the hall with long, nervous strides, hurried out onto the veranda. "Glad to meet you, Ismael. I'm McCleary of the Kluang office," he said, extending a blunt, hairy hand.

"Sorry to keep you waiting so long a time,"—the sub-inspector's smile revealed teeth surprisingly white. "A prou would have been swifter on some of the roads than that petrol eater." His calm brown eyes surveyed the other occupants of the veranda, five white-suited men, and two women, one in blue and the other in yellow, all trying to look at ease, all obviously worried or frightened.

McCleary hesitated, and then said in an undertone, "I'll just introduce you to these people, and then we'll go inside and I'll outline the situation." Ismael nodded. "As you will, Tuan."

With a jerk the white officer turned toward Clive. "Mr. Bosworth," he announced, "owner of the bungalow, and manager of the estate, and his guests, Miss

Chambers, and Mr. Sullivan." Clive stepped forward to shake hands, and Mike followed him, while Nancy merely stretched her stiff face into the semblance of a smile at Ismael's bobbing bow. McCleary, obviously anxious to get down to business, went on in an abrupt voice, "Mr. Harvy, first assistant, and Mrs. Harvy. Mr. Mason, second assistant, and Mr. Pearson, the third assistant." Betty's nod was curt, expressing her disapproval of a native official, but the men greeted Ismael with a semblance of cordiality.

Impatiently, McCleary waited for Ismael to make his stiff little bows, his formal acknowledgment and polite excuses, and then led the way into the house.

"This is the room where Mrs. Bosworth was found. She was lying on the couch, partly hidden by sofa pillows—Doctor Sparkes and I carried her down into the office under the house, where it is cooler. Do you want to see the body, and look things over here first, or shall I tell you what I have discovered?"

It was obvious that McCleary was anxious to talk about the case, and although Ismael would much prefer to make his own discoveries, glean his own impressions of the people involved, it seemed diplomatic, for the present, to follow McCleary's wishes. "Tell me, if you will, Tuan, what happened. Inspector Campbell told me only that Mrs. Bosworth had been stabbed while the servants and the officials on the estate were at a wayong, and that you wished assistance from his office. He would have come

himself had he not been working on another case which he couldn't leave."

McCleary nodded. "That's all right. I know something of your work, and if any one can get to the bottom of this blasted affair, I think you can. Sit down now, and we'll get on with it." He settled himself in a wicker chair beside the Malay in the farthest corner of the living room where they could talk without being overheard from either the veranda or the hall.

"About quarter of eleven tonight, Bill Pearson, the third assistant on the estate, called me up to report that Mrs. Bosworth had been stabbed. He was naturally upset, and from his statement I got the impression that she had killed herself. I knew all the outfit here, knew them well, and so I got hold of Doctor Sparkes and drove out as fast as I could. Didn't think it necessary to bring any of my men with me. It was obvious, even before the doctor made his examination, that she had been murdered, and murdered by some one she knew well—you see, she must have been facing the murderer and permitted him to come very close, close enough to stab her. There was no sign of a struggle, and no trace of the weapon, a dagger, or a sharp, two-edged knife of some sort."

McCleary drew a long breath, and his face contracted with an expression that seemed almost to be pain. "Well, as I said, I thought I knew these chaps, regarded them as friends, with the exception of Sullivan, perhaps; and I expected that I'd get co-operation from them. Mrs. Bos-

worth was a charming woman; you'd naturally think her husband and her friends would do everything possible to discover the murderer, wouldn't you?— But not at all. I hadn't talked to them five minutes before I knew they'd raised a wall against me. I wasn't a friend any more, I was a policeman, some one to distrust, to deceive."

Ismael's smile was sympathetic. "It was a difficult position for you. In trouble of this sort a policeman, like an undertaker, is a necessary evil—his unpleasant work overshadows all else."

"This is the first white murder I've ever had in my district," McCleary declared in an aggrieved tone. "I'd have sworn these chaps here were as fine and upstanding a group as you'd find on any estate in Malaya—and yet— Well, I'll get on with it. I got no change at all from any of the people I questioned; just the impression that they were each hiding something, and every one was afraid of what I might unearth; until I came to young Farnsworth. He had been lifting the brandy bottle at frequent intervals to steady his nerves—he isn't much of a drinker ordinarily, and apparently he had a grievance against every one on the estate. He definitely accused Bosworth of killing his wife, and Sullivan of being an accessory; and then slashed out at everybody, except Miss Chambers whom he didn't know. I'll read you my notes in a minute. There was a lot of confusion; everybody trying to shut him up, and then, before I could stop him, Bill Pearson knocked him out."

McCleary paused to pull forth a stubby pipe and a worn tobacco pouch. His fingers shook slightly as he packed the bowl and applied a match. "Are you a pipe smoker? No? Don't know what you miss. Cigarettes?" He made a motion toward a can on the table near by. Ismael shook his head, "None of the lesser vices are mine, Tuan."

McCleary seemed to relax some of his stiffness under the soothing influence of tobacco. "Where was I? Oh, yes—with the help of Jim Mason, I carried Farnsworth into Bosworth's bedroom, next door to this room, and brought him around. He was in no shape to talk so I left a kabun on guard at the hall door to see that no one bothered him, and then I called up Johore. Campbell thought I'd better keep every one involved here at the bungalow until you arrived. I decided that was as good a time as any to question the servants, so I had them come in one at a time—I sat in the dining room where I could see the hall, and at the same time, through the front windows, keep an eye on the people on the veranda. The only white person besides myself in the house was Miss Chambers who had asked to be allowed to change her clothes—she'd gotten wet in the storm. Bosworth showed her to the room, and then, in my presence, told his boy to have the servants serve supper out on the veranda. It was while they were waiting for supper that I started to interview the servants. Suddenly there was the most ungodly scream I ever heard. It echoed through

the whole house, and I couldn't tell where it had come from. I thought Miss Chambers might have been frightened by something, but she was all right. The kabun was still in front of the door guarding Farnsworth, and he said he didn't know where it had come from either, that no one had been in the hall. He was scared and dazed, and I suspected he'd been asleep, so I hurried into Bosworth's room. Farnsworth was gone. The room was empty, but there was a bloodstain on one of the window sills, and the shutters of that window were swinging loose."

Ismael had leaned forward, his eyes bright with interest. "Pardon, Tuan, but were there no other openings in the room?"

"Besides the entrance to the hall, there is another door at the head of a stairs leading down to Bosworth's office; he has it down there so the coolies and laborers can come and go without entering the house, but that door was locked, and the key was on the bedroom side of the door. I locked it myself after we'd carried Mrs. Bosworth down. No, Farnsworth must have gone through the window, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Every one had come running into the house to find out what had happened, and I herded them all back onto the veranda. Then I sent the servants out to look for Farnsworth. Didn't dare leave the house myself; had an idea the whole thing might have been staged to get me away. I called up the office and had four of my constables come out—all I dared take away from headquarters, and when

they arrived, I put them to work looking for the missing man. So far no one has found hide nor hair of him. There are footprints under the window, but whether they are Farnsworth's or some one's else, I don't know. I looked over the shoes worn by the people on the veranda, but none of them showed recent signs of mud and wet; hard to tell, of course, for the men had all been walking earlier in the storm. Anyway, I had had them all under my eye the whole time, except Miss Chambers, and she had clean, new gold sandals on, so that lets her out."

"And the servants, Tuan?"

"I can only vouch personally for Saidi, Mrs. Bosworth's maid. I was questioning her in the dining room at the time the scream came. The rest of the servants claim that they were all busy preparing supper. Their stories check and unless they are all lying, none of them could have gotten in to Farnsworth."

"The servants also had an alibi for the time of Mrs. Bosworth's death?"

"Yes, they all went to a wayong. The servants sat together, and left in a body about 10.00; they were to be back in the house by 10.20 to serve an 11-o'clock supper. The white men were there, too, for part of the wayong, but some of them came late, and all of them moved around. I'll read you their statements." McCleary pulled out his battered notebook, and leaned forward so that the light fell on the scrawled pages.

Ismael produced a similar black loose-leaf book, and with small, distinct handwriting began to jot down the points that interested him in the officer's singsong recital.

"Anything more I can tell you?" McCleary asked as he finished the last page of notes. His gaze, fixed on the precise characters which Ismael had been making, was unmistakably curious.

"You are sure, Tuan, that Mr. Hamilton was not the person who attacked Mr. Farnsworth, or helped to get him out of the room?"

"No, I don't think that's possible. I sent Bosworth's boy down to the factory immediately to check up on Hamilton. He said the Scotchman was sound asleep with his head on the table, just as Pearson reported earlier. The boy couldn't rouse him, but he said there was no trace of Farnsworth's having been there. What else is on your mind? I see you've a number of things written down. If you can see any glimmer of light in this affair, I'd like to know what it is."

For a brief second Ismael hesitated. This was the first time he had ever worked on a case with any one except Campbell, and he realized that he couldn't hope for the latitude which his own superior officer always permitted. He was accustomed to working things out by himself, and only reporting to Campbell when he had something of definite value. The little Malay stifled a sigh at the difficulties he foresaw. McCleary looked like a good man, an honest officer, but all the people

who were suspect were McCleary's friends. How much could Ismael afford to tell him as the investigation progressed—and yet it was essential that the two policemen work together harmoniously.

"These poor notes of mine are just suggestions," Ismael said with seeming candor. "My thought was this: that we cannot keep those people outside indefinitely. It is not seemly that all of them should suffer for the evil of one, or perhaps two. I would like to ask each of them a question or two before we permit them to retire."

McCleary looked dubious. "I thought we ought to keep them here until we had a chance to search their belongings—no telling what they may destroy if we let them go to their own bungalows. We ought to search their persons, too, in case they are concealing the weapon."

"Of course, Tuan, that might be done, but I think the murderer will have already covered his tracks, and we would find no evidence of the crime in his house. As for the others—it would take hours to search their houses, and it would arouse much ill feeling. The same is true of searching their persons—it could be done; but we must remember the murderer had an hour or more in which to hide the weapon, and surely he would be too cunning to carry it around with him."

McCleary looked relieved. "I'm glad you see it that way, Ismael. I hated snooping around their personal

things, but I didn't want to let my own feelings interfere in anything you thought ought to be done."

Ismael's smile was understanding. "It shall be done only if it becomes necessary. I think, too, Tuan, that if your men have not found any trace of Farnsworth after all this time, it would be well to wait until daylight to continue the search. If he does not appear then, we will get beaters to go through the jungle, and drag the river, but I have an idea, Tuan, that he will be found without so much trouble."

"You don't think he was killed, then?"

The Malay shrugged his plump shoulders. "You found no sign of a crime save some blood on the window sill. It seems unlikely that any one could have crawled into his room, attacked him—at which point he would have emitted the scream—and then, before you opened the door into the room, drag his body through the window, and make off with it. It seems to me rather, considering the state he was in, that he was frightened by something, and, fearing the vengeance of the men he had denounced, ran away."

"There was a loud bang," McCleary said thoughtfully; "Miss Chambers' door crashed against the hall wall. That may have startled him—the scream came almost at the same instant."

"At any rate, we can do nothing more for him tonight," Ismael announced. "But, these other people, we must watch and protect. You have four men, you said.

Why not then send one to guard each bungalow; one for the Harvys, one for that occupied by Pearson and Hamilton, one to the bungalow of Mason and Farnsworth, and the other to the factory? That will prevent any foolish move to run away, or to commit an indiscretion, and will also serve as a protection from harm for the innocent."

"Good, good!" McCleary exclaimed. "The men can keep us informed about what goes on. You and I will stay here, of course—that will give you an opportunity to look over this house. Now, about those questions you want to ask, do you mind telling me what they are? You don't have to, of course," he said hastily. "But I'd like to see how you work, and what I have overlooked. This is my first white murder case, and I admit I'm out of my element; you've made your mark in a lot of them, so I'd like to pick up something of your technique." He swallowed a gulp, and then said stumbingly: "I never thought I'd have a murder like this on my hands, but if it could happen once in an ideal place like the Semang Estate—it can happen again—I'd like to be more prepared next time."

McCleary was pathetic in his disillusion, his self abasement, Ismael thought, and furthermore, what he had said was true, he should be prepared to cope with crime among the white men of the district who were his own friends. Next time, it would not hurt him so much—he could better balance himself on that hazy line between

friendship and officialdom. "The questions, Tuan, are all suggested by your notes," Ismael said. "I am no Pawang to work magic on people I do not yet know." Ismael's voice was deprecating. "I will tell you the questions which I would ask; and this, Tuan, is no reflection, you will understand, on the work you have already done. Without that, I could not even see so far as the blank jungle wall that has been raised by all these unfortunate people."

The little Malay glanced down at his notes. "First, I would like to know more about Miss Chambers who came here from out beyond to discover her murdered friend. "That seems like more than one question, but I can sum it up so, 'Why did you come here now?' Of Mrs. Harvy I would ask, 'How did it come that a gentle lady like you, timid I am sure of storms, stayed alone in the house without even telephoning for companionship to your friend Lydia?'"

"Of Mr. Pearson, I would ask more details about the walk that Mrs. Bosworth took alone this afternoon, when most white women are sleeping—where she seemed to be going, from which exact direction she had come.

"And there, Tuan, I include questions to her maid, whether the poor lady was upset upon her return, and from the gardener, whether she brought back flowers and ferns. From Mr. Mason, I would request the kris mentioned by Tuan Farnsworth. From Tuan Farnsworth, I would like to know whether it was the brandy that spoke

tonight, or whether he deliberately bared his fangs? Of Mr. Bosworth, and this is very delicate, of course, I would ascertain his real feelings for his wife. I would like to know what Mr. Harvy wished to say to Mr. Bosworth that was important enough, at that time, to make him walk a mile out of his way, when he could easily have found other opportunities, more convenient, in which to speak to him. I would like to know exactly what is the motive for Mr. Sullivan's interest in Mr. Bosworth. Hamilton, of course, I would like to ask about the lights." He paused, and though his face was as impassive as Buddah's own, he added, "Of course, Tuan, one question may lead to others, or, as I hope, to voluntary statements."

McCleary's red face broadened into a grin. "More power to you, Inspector. You certainly picked out the kernel in each instance; but if you get a straightforward answer to those questions, I'd say you were qualified to hang out your shingle any day as a full-fledged Pawang."

Ismael's brown, oriental face was serious. "I must learn those answers, Tuan. I must have them, for their own sakes more than ours, they must tell me!"

McCleary, disconcerted by the Malay's gravity, started. "What do you mean?"

"Only the truth, in all its starkness, can combat the evil that stalks this plantation. Can't you feel it, Tuan? It is in the very air of this house!"

Involuntarily the officer gave a deep sniff. "Can't say

I do. The house seems all right to me—a bit damp, and there's the smell of mildew of course, and decay—always get that in damp weather. A bit gruesome too—the poor little lady downstairs, but tomorrow early, she'll be gone, and things will be normal.”

Ismael shook his head. “They can't be normal until we have caught the murderer. At least one of those people sitting so quietly on the veranda is the murderer, unless it is Tuan Hamilton, of course—and another, knowingly or unknowingly, holds the murderer's or murderess' fate in his hands—and so long as he does so, he, or she, is in mortal danger.”

“Good God, you think there'll be another murder?” McCleary jumped to his feet, his chin outthrust aggressively at the idea.

“I hope not, Tuan, but I feel strongly that these people must be persuaded to tell the truth at whatever cost to their own feelings. They are all hiding some little personal matters which might cause them to lose face with their friends—about which the police would care nothing—but in that morass of secrets is hidden the face of the murderer—and that is what concerns us. Let us peel away the lies and the fears, and we shall see him. But, the murderer too knows that danger—he is counting on the personal vanity, the ambitions perhaps, the dread of scandal, of his or her associates. He is watching, waiting, listening for the first hint that he is known; he is even now trying to influence them, to misdirect suspi-

cion, and if his efforts fail—? Well, he has killed once. What has he to lose now by killing again to protect his secret?"

McCleary gave a strong pull on his pipe which had gone out, and strangled on a mouthful of nicotine—unpleasant as it was, it was more palatable than the things his colleague had been saying. "I see what you mean. Yes—it's quite in order, damn it all," he spluttered, and then added meekly: "What can we do? Who do you think is in the most danger? Tell me that and I'll watch over him like a wet nurse. I can't fight ideas or fears, but give me something tangible, and I'll stick till hell freezes over!"

Ismael looked troubled. "If only we could know that, how simple it would be! I can't be sure." He glanced down at his notebook, flicked its pages, and then shook his head. "I can't tell—it is too soon," he muttered, half to himself. "I must talk to them all, get to know them—and then, it may be too late." He closed the notebook, and for a moment was absolutely still, every muscle in his plump body relaxed as though he were making it vulnerable to unseen forces and emotions.

It all seemed a bit theatric to McCleary who was drawing placidly now on a cleared pipe, and yet—there was something about the funny little beggar that got under your skin. "I don't know, Tuan," Ismael said frankly, "but my feeling is that we should watch over the little American girl with exceeding care. It was she

who found the body, who spent such a long, unexplained time in the house, and who has told us so little of herself. Who knows what she may have discovered here; what trace of the murderer she may have found? Without even realizing it, she may be holding his life in her small hand. He left—she came later, so he had no chance to cover up any loose ends or clues he may have left. Oh, yes, Tuan, it is clear that it must be she the murderer is watching more than the others. Allah protect her!”

CHAPTER VII

Nancy, quite unaware of the fact that her safety was a subject of concern to the officers in the next room, was feeling a growing sense of confidence. She was no longer a little nonentity in a crumpled suit, crouching unnoticed on the outskirts of a group of strangers. Her radically changed appearance, her assumed poise, had had its own reward in the homage that was being paid her by the men. She could read the measure of her success in Betty Harvy's hard eyes, and ill-disguised hostility. The men who had rushed into the house at the sound of Farnsworth's terrified shriek had regarded her with varying degrees of admiration and solicitude, and despite their reaction to the new mystery, and to McCleary's abrupt orders, had accorded Nancy a new position. She was not only an honored guest now, but the hostess.

The houseboy, carrying the coffee tray on to the veranda, had deposited it matter-of-factly on the table in front of her, and Clive, noticing her involuntary glance at Betty Harvy, had said quietly, "Don't mind serving the coffee, do you, Miss Chambers?"

Betty, who had expected to act as hostess, exclaimed, "Perhaps I had better pour, Clive; it is an art, you

know, to get just the right proportions of syrup and hot milk, and Miss Chambers is still a stranger out here."

Clive, oblivious of her intent, had remarked easily, "She'll have to get used to it—I'll show her." He moved to Nancy's side. "The coffee essence is in that small jug, and the hot milk in the tall one. Mike and I like our coffee strong, so you can make it half and half for us. The others can tell you how much they like of each—you'll soon get the hang of it."

Betty bit her lip. "You seem to be assuming, Clive, that Miss Chambers is going to stay on here indefinitely, but you know, of course, that that is out of the question. She will want to go back to Singapore as soon as possible. No girl could afford to stay on in the house with two men."

John Harvy spoke up promptly, "Of course, Betty, Miss Chambers will come to us. I thought you would have arranged that." His wife glared at him, but before she could reply, Mike Sullivan interposed, "I don't think we will have much to say about any arrangement so long as the police are in charge. I'm sure Miss Chambers appreciates your concern, Betty, but really, with six policemen in the house, I don't believe any one is going to worry about her reputation." Mike smiled at Nancy, whose hands were hovering uncertainly over the coffee cups.

Was he really being friendly, Nancy wondered, or was he just using her to annoy Betty Harvy?

Conversation during the picnic supper had been desultory, and no one had been able to eat very much from the heaped plates passed by the white-coated Malay boy. However, as soon as he had removed the traces of solid food, Nancy was kept busy filling and refilling coffee cups. Every one was distrait, and the knowledge that McCleary, moving restlessly back and forth, scorning both supper and coffee, could hear everything that was said, acted upon them all like a damper. Each time one of the native policemen who had been sent out to search for Farnsworth returned to report his failure, the officer's voice grew sharper with fresh directions, and the tension on the veranda tightened.

It was Mike who, seated on Nancy's right, broke the oppressive silence by starting a discussion about hunting—the only subject sufficiently impersonal to be safe. Although it was to Nancy he was ostensibly speaking, it seemed to her that the topic had been chosen primarily to interest Clive, and to release him from Betty's proprietary whispers. If that had been the Irishman's purpose, he succeeded, for with more animation than he had displayed all evening, Clive leaned across Jim Mason and Nancy to join Mike in reminiscences of various hunting experiences with boar, seladang, tiger.

Jim Mason had lapsed into a somber reverie, his efforts to establish a bond between himself and Nancy having been lost in the excited argument about the relative danger from tigers and from boars. Nancy turned

to him suddenly. "Tell me, Mr. Mason, do tigers and panthers and things ever get inside a house like this?"

A smile brightened his homely face. "So, you've been reading some of those damned travel books, have you? And scaring yourself to death. I'll bet you looked under your bed for hamadryads, and shook out your shoes in case a coral snake had cached himself there!"

Nancy flushed. "Well, I was afraid—especially when I first went into the house and couldn't find a light," she admitted confidentially. "That's what took me so long. I was scared to death that something would pounce on me, or worse yet twine itself around me."

His voice was sympathetic, and appreciating that her fear was still haunting her, his words were comfortably matter of fact. "The house is on piles, you see, in order, among other things, to keep snakes out. Of course there are pythons and various other kinds of snakes in the jungle, but you can walk there for miles without ever seeing one. Tigers and panthers are cowardly beasts, and as a rule they shun habitations—there is plenty of easier game for them in the jungle. I think there is only one case on official record of a tiger going into a house; that was years ago, and it was a native hut on the outskirts of a kampong. Once in a blue moon you hear of a panther getting into some isolated dwelling, but I've been out here two years, and I've never known any one who had an actual experience. You are really a whole lot safer

here, so far as wild animals and snakes are concerned, than you'd be in New York traffic."

Nancy sighed her relief. "I remember now that it is India where the snakes crawl into bed with you, and drop from the ceiling. Thank you for telling me about this place though. I'm sure I'll sleep better tonight than I expected to—that is, if we are ever permitted to go to bed."

Jim Mason smiled. "It's bound to seem strange to you at first, but it's surprising how quickly you'll get used to the life here, and what a hold it will get on you. But then, of course, you are used to adapting yourself to strange environments."

Nancy looked surprised, and he explained, "Being an actress, I mean, travelling about, putting up in all sorts of places. Lydia told me about some of her amusing experiences, and some that were darn near tragic. And you were in her company, weren't you? How did you happen to get so far from the States?"

Instantly Nancy was on guard. "Oh, I have always wanted to come to the Far East, so I jumped at the first chance that presented itself."

Jim shook his head disapprovingly. "The East is no place for a girl on her own. Particularly a girl like you—somehow you are quite different from what I expected, but that just makes it worse."

"What do you mean?" Nancy asked sharply.

"Oh, I don't know. I thought somehow you would be older—Lydia's age—thirtyish—and more hardboiled. You

look so young and, well, sort of vulnerable, as if you hadn't been around much."

At that moment, before Nancy had had to reply, every one caught the sound of a car crawling up the hill, and McCleary had hurried forward to meet the detective from Johore.

Nancy's first sight of Ismael had been disillusioning. He looked like an ordinary Malay servant dressed up in a khaki uniform. His round, brown face was bland and inscrutable, and during the introductions that had followed, his expression had never changed. "Oh, dear," Nancy had thought; "he'll never find the murderer," and then, with an elation purely selfish, "At least I needn't fear him. He'll never know who I really am." She thought with complacency of the telegrams and letters she had concealed almost under McCleary's nose, of the way she had elicited Clive's support, and of the noticeable effect she had achieved with her changed appearance.

She was surprised to notice, after the policemen had gone indoors, that no one else was sharing her feeling of relief. The men had drawn closer together, and were talking in low tones. "You'd never think to look at him that he is the smartest detective in the East," Mike Sullivan warned. "Don't let that Buddhalike expression fool you." "Yes," chimed in John Harvy. "Look at the way he solved the murders in the Johore Rest House, and at the Crag Hotel in Penang." "And don't forget that af-

fair of the English Mess in the old Malay Palace," Jim Mason said; "I think that was his best job." Even the rather silent Bill Pearson had a word to contribute. "He gets his dope because white people underestimate him. He's so damn polite, with his brown face, that people come to regard him as casually as they do the native servants."

"Well, I don't care what you say about him," Betty said with a toss of her blonde curls; "I'm not going to give him any change, and I'm not going to have his brown hands pawing through all my personal belongings, either. I don't know what the Government is coming to, when natives start bossing white people around. No wonder we are losing face out here."

The next half hour seemed endless to the people on the veranda. The men moved restlessly back and forth half consuming cigarettes and leaving them to smoulder on ash trays; while the two women constantly shifted their positions in the creaking rattan chairs whose ridges bit through their scanty clothing. The air seemed more breathless than ever, and the atmosphere on the veranda grew momentarily more strained and ominous, as though the fears emanating from the seven people there were on the point of assuming definite and horrible shapes.

It was a relief when McCleary and Ismael once more appeared, and the white officer announced, "Sub-Inspector Ismael would like to ask a few questions, and then those of you who wish to may go home." He turned to

the stolid little Malay. "I'll leave you now for a while. I want to look around a bit outside, and check up on my men. I'll have them back here by the time you are through."

Ismael bent his head politely. "Very good, Tuan," and then as McCleary clumped down the steps, he addressed the expectant group on the veranda. "As Tuan McCleary explained, I will keep you just a little longer now, and then you may be free to go to your rest. Tomorrow is yet another day, and this night is already overfull of sorrow and trouble." His narrow Mongolian eyes surveyed each strained white face, and then he continued, "Those who have farthest to go, I think should be first released from this unpleasant vigil. Mrs. Harvy, if you will be so good—?" He motioned toward the hall door.

For a moment Betty hesitated, her full lips a stubborn red line, but John Harvy's pressure on her arm was urgent, and she said ungraciously, "Well, what do you want to know?"

"That I will tell you, Madame, when we are alone. I think it is better to talk to each of you apart. If you will go inside—?"

"I'm not going into that living room," she declared even as she found herself rising to her feet.

"Have no fear of unpleasantness," Ismael assured her patiently; "Mrs. Bosworth's body is no longer there to disturb your feelings."

Leaving a trail of heavy perfume in her wake, Betty,

followed by the little Malay, walked slowly into the house. Having ensconced her solicitously in the chair recently vacated by McCleary, Ismael settled himself at a respectful distance and pulled out his notebook.

"Why do you think it was that the lights in this house went out during the storm, and the lights in your house remained on?" he asked.

It was obviously not the question she had expected, and her stiff body relaxed as she said with a shrug, "I don't know. I'm not a mechanic. Perhaps a fuse blew out or something."

"No, that can hardly be," Ismael said gravely. "There is no sign in the fuse box of a new fuse—they are all in the same condition, tarnished, and the cover of the box is coated with dust."

"Then, all I can say is that Miss Chambers was—" she hesitated, and her voice was spiteful as she said, "Shall we say, 'mistaken.'"

"That is a possibility," Ismael conceded, "though I think under the circumstances, a stranger coming into a dark house would have made every effort to find a light. No one with an electric fixture before his eyes would choose the romantic glimmer of a candle. There is another possibility, Mrs. Harvy"—his voice hardened as he leaned forward to stare into her startled, shrinking face, "and that is that your lights were off too."

Betty started. "If you are implying that I lied—" she shrilled.

"Not at all," Ismael disclaimed. "I merely believe that you do not know whether your lights were on or off."

"You mean, I fell asleep. Well, I didn't."

"No, I mean that you cannot know, because you weren't there."

Fear stared for a second from her eyes before her lashes curled over them, and her hands clenched in her lap. "No," she declared. "No. I was in the house all the time. The lights never went off."

Ismael shrugged. "That is all then. I have no more to ask you now. Only, I warn you, I am going to find out the truth." For a second time she stared at him, and then shaking out the folds of her blue georgette dress, rose and swept out of the room.

"Will you be so kind as to ask your husband to come in, Mrs. Harvy?" Ismael asked mildly as she reached the door.

Betty didn't deign to reply, but a moment later, John Harvy was seated in the chair opposite Ismael.

"What can I do for you, Inspector?" he asked in a pleasant voice. "I've been thinking all evening about this dreadful thing, but for the life of me, I can't recall anything that would throw any light on it. It is inconceivable that any one would have wished Lydia harm."

"We will reach the truth in time, Tuan," Ismael said, and then asked, almost casually, "What was the business you wished to consult Tuan Bosworth about this evening?"

John Harvy blinked, obviously disconcerted so that it took him a second to adjust his thoughts. "There has been a steady decline in our rubber production," he said reluctantly. "Nothing really serious as yet, but it has worried me since I got the last figures from Hamilton. The trees are all healthy, the coolies have been working well, and yet, for the last three months the output has fallen off steadily. I had been thinking about it all day, and wanted to go into the matter with Clive. As you may have gathered, he doesn't take much interest in the estate, and it is difficult to pin him down to a serious discussion. I had hoped to talk to him this afternoon, but I saw him drive off with Sullivan, so I made up my mind that I'd get hold of him this evening, and insist that he set a definite time tomorrow to go into the matter. I thought he'd be in a good humor tonight, and that if I approached him properly, he'd be reasonable." John drew a long breath. "Clive is a good enough chap, but he is what the Americans call a 'playboy.'"

"How does it happen then that he is Manager of this estate?"

"That's easy." There was a bitter note in the older man's voice. "His father is Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Semang Rubber Estate, and the principal stockholder. Clive is the second son, and was a bit difficult; too much of a good fellow. The father lost patience and as a last resort sent him out East to work on one of the estates in Sumatra with the understanding

that when he learned the business, he would have a responsible position. Clive has brains enough when he wants to apply himself, and he really did very well, so well that when the manager of this estate retired, Clive was put in charge."

"I see," Ismael nodded. "And since he has come here, he has not been, what you English say, 'pulling his weight'?"

"No, I don't consider that he has." John's eyes looked frankly into Ismael's. "I realize that it isn't diplomatic for me to say so under the circumstances, but every one knows it—even Bosworth senior, who is nobody's fool, began to suspect it. He put the matter squarely up to Lydia when she was home a while back—told her she would have to keep Clive's nose to the grindstone or he'd be out of a job. The old gentleman had a great deal of confidence in Lydia, after his first prejudice had worn off, and they understood each other. For a little while after she came back from England, Clive took hold, but lately he has been slipping again——"

The little Malay tapped his pencil thoughtfully. "So you didn't have an opportunity as yet to speak to Tuan Bosworth about the rubber yield?"

"No, as I said, he and Sullivan had left for the wayong when I got here, and on the way up to the house later, the other men were around, and I didn't like to say anything in front of them. I'll have to wait now, I suppose, until he gets over this shock."

"Thank you for your frankness, Mr. Harvy." Ismael rose and accompanied the Englishman to the veranda. "May I speak with you, Mr. Mason?" his soft voice interrupted Jim's conversation with Nancy.

As he led the way back into the house, the detective paused at the living-room door. "I am interested, Tuan, in the Malay kris which Mr. Farnsworth said Mrs. Bosworth admired. Will you tell one of the 'boys' where it can be found and let him get it?"

Jim frowned, "Sure, I'd be glad to," he said slowly. "The trouble is, I can't for the life of me remember seeing it since the day Lydia commented upon it. It's been worrying me ever since Farnsworth brought up the subject. You see, it is just the sort of weapon that might have been used tonight—and any one could have picked it up. Mahat, my boy, might know where it is, but he's at the wayong."

"That can be easily remedied. We will send Semut—that I believe is the name of Tuan Bosworth's boy, down to the wayong, and he can tell your Mahat to find the kris and bring it here."

"Fine," Jim looked relieved. "Of course there's probably nothing in it; but I'll feel a lot better when I see it. I'll look up Semut now and send him off with the message."

At Ismael's nod of approval, he hurried down the hall and through the door leading to the servants' quarters. The detective turned back to the veranda, and beck-

oned to Bill Pearson who jumped up nervously as though he'd been awaiting the summons.

"Tuan," Ismael said when they were seated in the living room, "I would like to know more about Mrs. Bosworth's stroll this afternoon."

Bill stared at him in surprise. "I told all I knew to McCleary, and I presume he passed the word along. I just happened to notice her cutting across the corner of my division, about a mile from the house."

"From which direction was she coming, and where did she seem to be going?"

Bill's smooth forehead wrinkled into a frown as he tried to recall his glimpse of Lydia. "I'd say she had come from the house, and was headed toward the neck of jungle between my division and Mason's."

"Was there anything else you can recall about her appearance?" Ismael asked, stifling his disappointment. He had hoped she was on her way back to the house, and that there might have been something in her attitude that would indicate her state of mind.

"No, she was some distance from me. I couldn't see her plainly because of the trees, she had on a light green dress, and a big straw hat that shaded her face. She didn't seem to be hurrying, but neither did she seem to be strolling aimlessly—if you know what I mean. I shouted to her, and she waved her hand."

"Did she have anything in it, in her hand?"

"Yes, by George, she did!" Bill exclaimed. "Funny,

but I didn't think of it until now—she had some sort of basket.”

“Thank you, Tuan, that will be all for the present.”

Bill looked startled at his dismissal, but instead of welcoming his release, he sat still for a moment. “Look here, Inspector, I was a damn fool to lose my temper over Farnsworth this evening—but I don't want you to get a wrong impression about it, or about my relations with Mrs. Bosworth. I hated to hear Dave making such a blithering idiot of himself, of course, and when he implied things about Lydia and me, I hit without thinking. Which, of course, only made things look worse. I'd just like to tell you about the episode he referred to, if you don't mind?”

Ismael stared at the handsome troubled face opposite him, and then nodded permission.

“It really didn't amount to a row of beans,” Bill said eagerly. “I'd come in looking for Clive. He wanted a pig shoot and had asked me to get hold of the beaters. Lydia was sitting in the chair over there—the long one.” He pointed to the Singapore chair opposite them, where Nancy had lain earlier in the evening. “And when she got up, I saw she had been crying. It was a jolt to see her in tears—she was always so gay, and efficient—never let things get her down, the way most of us do. I asked her what the trouble was and whether I could help her, and, of course, that was just the wrong thing to do, for she began to sob. She was all broken up over something,

no doubt about it. I put my arm around her shoulder, and patted her. She said she was at her wits' end, and had to tell somebody; but before she could control herself enough to talk, young Farnsworth came bursting in. I heard him coming, and gave her a little shove by way of warning; and hoped that he wouldn't notice anything was wrong. He's something of a snoop, as you may have noticed; his way of making himself important. That's all there was to it. I went out with him; he'd come in to borrow some magazines for Betty Harvy, and I didn't want him to get the idea that I was hanging around for a *tête-à-tête* with Lydia."

"She never told you what had been troubling her?"

"No," Bill said. "The next time I saw her, she told me to please forget what a bally fool she'd been, and she showed plainly that she didn't want to say anything more about it."

"Your impression was that it was something serious?"

"It must have been. I've known her for two years, and I never saw her out of control before, or since—not even when Clive was shot."

Ismael blinked. "When was that?"

"A couple of weeks ago. We were pig shooting. Cripes! it must have been the one I'd gotten the beaters for. Yes, it was the day after she'd been crying, because that was the first chance I'd had to speak to her again. And it was on our way over to the other side of the river that she told me to forget it."

"What happened to Mr. Bosworth?" Ismael leaned forward.

"No one quite knows. He and Lydia were stationed at a point in the bluker when the pigs broke. There was a lot of shooting, and one of the bullets struck Clive in the thigh. There had been lots of running around and excitement, and we couldn't find the bullet, so there was no telling whose shot had gone wild, or whether he had somehow managed to hit himself. Every one was awfully concerned, of course, but there was no real harm done—just a scratch. Clive didn't think anything about it, laughed it off as an accident, and said he'd really rather not know which of his friends was such a rotten shot."

"You were all there? Mrs. Harvy, too?"

"Yes, everybody. Betty put on a show; she wouldn't miss a chance like that. Screamed and fainted. Lydia was the one to keep her head."

Ismael hesitated, uncertain whether to question Bill further on the subject. There were many details he wanted to know about the episode, but it might be wiser not to emphasize the matter at this time lest Pearson, suspecting his interest, might put the other men on their guard.

Bill, apparently engrossed in his own line of thought, continued, "No, Lydia wasn't easily upset. She was more like a man in her attitude toward life. I don't mean that she wasn't feminine, but that she had the humor and tolerance and efficiency that you'd expect from a man."

That was why I liked her. As a rule I manage to steer clear of women—one reason I took a job off in the wilds like this. The only women that could stick this life would be those that were married to it, and the visiting girls that cropped up occasionally—well, I could dodge them.”

Strange that a young man so virile, so handsome, should speak with such bitterness, Ismael thought. Doubtless he had been disillusioned by women who had run after him. If that was true, was it possible that Mrs. Bosworth, of whom he spoke so warmly, had attracted him more than he was willing to admit? Had he misjudged her feeling for her husband, made overtures which she had repulsed, and then in anger or shame, killed her? After all, it was only when Farnsworth insinuated things about Mrs. Bosworth and himself that Pearson had struck him—and it was interesting to note that it had been Pearson who resented the aspersions, not Clive.

“Thank you, Tuan.” Ismael was suddenly conscious that Bill had stopped speaking and was gazing at him with a puzzled expression. “I am very glad to have had this talk with you. Will you please ask Mr. Sullivan to come in?”

Was it possible that the shooting of Clive Bosworth had not been an accident, but a deliberate attempt upon his life? All of the people on the Estate were experienced hunters—it was strange that one of them should have been so criminally careless. Had the shot which grazed the husband perhaps been intended for the wife? Had that

been a first attempt to murder Lydia Bosworth? Ismael had thought that the murder had been done on the spur of the moment, but the absence of the weapon indicated that the murderer had come armed, and, if there had been a previous attempt to shoot her, then it meant that they were not dealing with a hot-headed man or woman who had struck in a moment of fear or rage, but with a cold-blooded, ruthless killer.

CHAPTER VIII

Ismael's unpleasant brooding was interrupted by the appearance of Mike Sullivan, his jaunty manner not quite concealing the wary expression in his green eyes. A few moments' conversation convinced the detective that he had small hope at present of penetrating the Irishman's guard.

"What do I do for a living?" Mike laughed. "I have a small patrimony, and I eke out a lean existence here and there. In spite of my American mother I have the Irish luck at horses and cards, and none at all with women. Not that I want any I've seen yet, thank God. Give me a good dog and a good gun, and I ask nothing more."

Only when Clive Bosworth's name was mentioned did the Irishman show any feeling. "I knew him since he was a little lad. He's five years younger than I—just the age my brother would have been. They were inseparable pals. I got the habit of looking after the both of them."

"What happened to your brother?"

It seemed to Ismael that Mike's face whitened under its tan, and that there was a throb of pain in the deep voice. "He was killed in an accident. I don't talk about it."

"Do you think your influence has been good for Mr. Bosworth?" Ismael asked.

Mike showed no resentment of the question, and his answer was prompt. "I know it. I know him better than any one does. He's got to have a certain amount of diversion, or he wouldn't stick it; he'd go off the deep end. And hunting is safer than women."

"You liked Mrs. Bosworth?"

"She was fine," Mike said simply. "I wish now that I had told her some of the things I knew about Clive; my reason for acting as I did. She mistrusted me, you know, and that made me stubborn—I couldn't tell her—" He stopped.

"You mean that you were afraid he was too much interested in Mrs. Harvy?"

Mike nodded. "That was part of it. I thought I could break that affair up, keep Clive away from her without his knowing what I was about. I couldn't tell Lydia—you see, when he first got interested in Lydia I did everything I could to discourage it, and he told her so. I'd only met her once casually before I came out East, and when Clive wrote that they were engaged, I raised merry hell about it. I thought she was just another American gold digger, and that when she found Clive didn't have any money of his own, she'd dish him. I didn't want him to get in deep enough to be hurt. She never forgave me for that. I don't blame her—she didn't know I'd completely changed my mind about her; and that all I ever wanted was Clive's happiness and security." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Hunting is not always so safe a sport, Tuan, even among experts, as you imply," Ismael remarked. "I understand that Mr. Bosworth had an accident not long ago."

"Yes," Mike said frowning. "Damned careless on some one's part. Clive might have been killed. Some one shot directly into the thicket where he and Lydia were standing, the bloody fool. If I'd known who it was I'd have broken his gun over his thick head."

"How is the situation now with regard to Mrs. Harvy?" The detective casually changed the subject, satisfied that it hadn't occurred to Mike that the shot at Clive might have been deliberate, or that it might have been meant for Lydia.

"I don't know. I haven't given him much time lately to be with her. She asked him for tea this afternoon; that's why I whisked him away to Batu Pahat on the trail of a mythical tiger." His grin at the success of that ruse faded, however, as he went on. "I don't like the present look of things—Betty acts as though Clive had been signed, sealed and delivered to her."

"You think she is in love with him?"

"I think she'd like to marry him," Mike said bluntly. "She wants to get away from the East, and Clive is the only person she's found recently that hates it out here as much as she does, so she's been playing up to him."

"And what are his feelings?"

"I think he is flattered by the fuss she makes over him,

and she made him think that Lydia was a tyrant, but I don't believe for a minute that he is in love with her, or ever thought of marrying her. She got in her fine work, of course, when Lydia was away—he practically lived at the Harvy bungalow—as I discovered when I came back from Africa.”

“What does Mr. Harvy think about it?”

“It's hard to tell. Betty is the sort of woman who always has to have another man hanging around, so I imagine he's gotten used to it. I don't think he'd stand for any real monkey business—but on the other hand, he might be glad to get rid of her. I know I would be.”

Jim Mason appeared in the doorway. “I don't want to interrupt, Sergeant, but Mahat just brought the kris, and I thought you'd want to see it right away.”

“Good.” Ismael rose. “Mr. Sullivan and I were completed.”

Mike sauntered toward the door, he was rather pleased with his share in the interview; he had told, with seeming frankness, everything that the detective would have been bound to discover.

Jim, his face shining with relief, handed the little weapon to the detective. “Mahat found it in the back of my desk, in its usual place; and it doesn't look to me as though it had been touched for weeks. See? The blade is clean, and the gold handle is tarnished, even the little tuft of hair is dusty.” Ismael examined the dagger carefully. It was a clever bit of workmanship, a tiny replica

of an old Malay kris, a slender steel blade about six inches long, topped by an intricately carved handle of gold and silver, with a waving tuft of black hair. There was no indication that the weapon had ever been used; the edges of the blade were razor sharp, but the steel, though clouded, was unstained. Particles of dust had lodged in the carving of the handle, and there was a greyish tinge in the dark plume of hair.

Jim Mason had been watching the detective anxiously. "You see, don't you, that it hasn't been used?"

"No, that is obvious," Ismael agreed. "It is a clever bit of work, Tuan. Where did you find it?"

"It was pushed back in my desk," Mason repeated, and then laughed. "Oh, you mean where did I buy it? I picked it up in the Dutch East Indies—I've forgotten whether it was in a Pasar at Batavia, or in Belawan Dewi. I bought a lot of stuff on that trip to send home, but I liked this baby and kept it." His eyes narrowed as he saw Ismael place the dagger on the table instead of returning it to him. The Malay smiled. "I will cherish it, Tuan, have no fear, but I would like to keep it a little longer."

McCleary appeared in the doorway. "I have the men all in now, Ismael. They didn't find a trace of Farnsworth. The servants had tramped all over the tracks under the window, and the road, though I particularly warned them." His tone was disgusted. "That's the worst of not being able to superintend the job yourself." He

glowered at Mason as though blaming him for the fact that he hadn't been able to leave the house.

"We may be able to see more in the morning, Tuan," Ismael consoled. "Allah's light is better than man's. The sun may show us things that the flashlights overlooked." He moved to McCleary's side and lowered his voice. "You have explained to your men what their duties are?"

"Yes, they understand they are to guard the various buildings and report everything that happens." The officer looked grim. "Did you get any change out of the people you've talked to?"

Ismael's smile was inscrutable. "Yes, Tuan—a number of interesting facts raised their heads, but what they mean, I cannot tell at present. We will have a talk together later if you will." He glanced sideways at Jim Mason, and McCleary nodded his understanding. "I think I will not question Tuan Bosworth tonight, so there remains only Miss Chambers. Perhaps you will be so good as to ask her to come inside when you return to the veranda to dismiss your unwilling guests."

"The sooner they are out of the way now, the better I'll be pleased," McCleary grunted. "I wish I never had to set eyes on any of them again."

Ismael smiled. "That feeling will pass, like everything else, Tuan. When we know the truth, your friendship will be even closer with all save the murderer. Do not judge hastily."

Nancy came slowly into the room, as though the slow-

ness of her feet would disguise the rapid beating of her heart. The other people who had been interviewed had all seemed worried and depressed as they straggled back to the veranda, and with the departure of the Harvys, Pearson, and Jim Mason, she felt strangely defenseless. Clive Bosworth and Mike had been so engrossed in their low-voiced conference that they didn't even look up to give her an encouraging nod.

"Sit down, Miss Chambers." The squat little Malay motioned to the chair opposite his own. "I will not keep you long from your bed." Nancy sank down on the seat he indicated, and waited nervously for her ordeal to begin.

"When did you last hear from Mrs. Bosworth?"

"A week or so ago," Nancy improvised, and then added, as though to forestall further questions, "She wanted me to visit her, but at that time I had a position which I couldn't leave. Then, suddenly I lost my job, and so I was able to come after all."

"Her last letter to you—it was cheerful?"

"Oh, yes," Nancy replied, smiling at the memory of the gay little note she had had six weeks earlier.

Ismael's almond-shaped eyes stared at her thoughtfully. The girl was concealing something. Her hazel eyes, raised so candidly to his, didn't match the slim fingers that were twitching the edges of her chiffon handkerchief.

"Did you write Mrs. Bosworth of your change in plans?"

Nancy caught her breath. "I told her the last time I

wrote, that I would come when I could, but I didn't say when that would be. I wanted to see something of the country on my way." The handkerchief was a ball now, crumpled in a small damp fist.

"And did you enjoy your trip, from—where did you say you were?"

"Rangoon." Nancy desperately named the first place she could think of. "But I didn't see much of the country—I had an attack of malaria."

Ismael noted the white translucence of her skin which showed no trace of the yellowish aftermath of malaria. What had the girl been up to during this past week? She was a pathetically obvious liar.

"Tell me what occurred when you reached the house tonight," he requested, dropping the subject of her travels.

Nancy's tautness immediately relaxed, she was on familiar ground now, and her voice, for the first time during the interview, had an unmistakable ring of truth as she once more described her arrival, her fear of the dark house and its ominous stillness—the shock of finding Lydia's body.

"You heard nothing—not the sound of a closing door, of footsteps?"

"No, nothing," Nancy replied earnestly. "The house felt deserted, if you know what I mean. I was afraid, yes—but it was of the darkness, of the strangeness of everything—I even thought there might be a snake, or a tiger or something. But I had no feeling, at any time, that

there was a human being around, and I was so keyed up, I think I would have known instinctively if there had been any one here."

It sounded unconvincing to herself as she spoke, but the little Malay seemed to understand. He knew what she meant, and he liked her sensitiveness of perception—few white people had it.

"You didn't touch anything in the house? You left all as you found it?"

"I used both candlesticks, as I told you," Nancy said, trying to remember again everything she had done, "and I pressed the electric-light button, turned the key close to them, and I even fiddled with the bulbs themselves to be sure they weren't loose. In the living room, I pulled aside the orange pillow, I touched Lydia's shoulder—" she shivered at the recollection, "but I am sure I didn't touch anything else—not even the furniture. I held my candle up high while I looked around the room, and down low when I tried to find whether Lydia had killed herself—if she had the pistol or knife it must have fallen to the floor. There was nothing. And anyway, I think I knew from the beginning that some one had killed her."

"You didn't destroy anything? Take anything away with you? Even something that seemed unimportant?"

Nancy, remembering the telegrams, felt herself flushing. "I took nothing from the room," she affirmed—after all, the telegrams had been in the hall, and they had nothing to do with Lydia's murder.

Ismael sighed; the girl was lying again. What in Allah's name was she concealing!

"You had never met any of these people before, except Mr. Bosworth?" he asked.

"No," Nancy said. "And I had never met Mr. Bosworth either."

If that was true, and he felt that it was, whatever she was hiding was something which concerned only herself. She was playing a lone game, and one that was even more dangerous than he had thought.

"What do you think of these people? How have they treated you?" he asked abruptly.

Nancy looked surprised at his question, and he explained. "It is more important than you think, than you can understand. You will help me if you will tell me what you feel about them, and how they have acted toward you. You wish me to find the person who murdered your friend, do you not?"

"Yes. Oh, yes!" The girl's voice was eager, genuine. "I'll do anything to help punish him—only," she threw her hands apart in a helpless little gesture, "what can I do?"

Ismael smiled as he would at a child. "You are a stranger here—you are not involved in the politics or scandal of the estate. Your coming was unexpected to the murderer, for you are an unknown quantity. You understand what I mean? He must have been able to predict to some extent how the others would react, but

he knows nothing about what you will do, or say or think!"

Nancy nodded. "I see what you mean." She was quiet for a moment or two, and then shook her head. "There was nothing significant about the behavior of any one of them, so far as I can judge. Of course they are strangers to me, and I don't know how they would act at all under normal circumstances. After their first concern for me, when I fainted, you know, their chief desire, quite naturally, was to hear what I had seen and done. After that was over with, they rather forgot me—it wasn't until I asked Mr. Bosworth whether I might change my clothes that he seemed to realize that I was there at all. I looked like something the cat dragged in anyway—and I was an outsider—every one had plenty on his mind." Her lips curved into a smile. "After I had fixed myself up a bit, and repaired the damages, I seemed for the first time to register as a person."

Ismael's eyes twinkled. "At first you were a little wet mouse, and then, behold, you were a peacock!"

Nancy laughed. "Something like that. Clothes made the woman!" Suddenly her face was quiet, sad. "The dreadful thing to me is the fact that none of them seem to want Lydia's murderer discovered, and," her voice quavered a bit, "I don't think any of them feel any deep sorrow—not her husband, not one of those people who she must have thought were her friends. Even I—" she broke off with a frightened glance at the detective— "Oh,

don't misunderstand me—Lydia was my friend, I want to see her murderer captured—I loathe myself when personal considerations crop up!" With sudden fear she realized that she had said too much, implied, God knew what. Leaning forward so that the light shone on her bronze hair, her eager young face, she added, "It is hateful being mixed up in a murder case, you know—it is going to damn me from here to yon—and I do have to think of that, hateful as it seems."

The little Malay looked grave. "I realize, Miss Chambers, that there are many things I do not know. I have two duties: one to find the murderer; and two, to protect the innocent. I do not wish to alarm you, but I want you to be very careful with these people until the murderer is discovered. Do not go anywhere alone with any one, under any circumstance. Keep your shutters fastened at night, and lock your door when you are in your room."

The girl stared at him with wide, incredulous eyes. "Why, what do you mean? Who would want to hurt me? I don't even know them!"

Ismael sighed. "You were the first person to discover the body. You alone had the opportunity to see anything that the murderer had overlooked; your presence may have upset his plans in a dozen ways, just because it was outside his expectations. Do you not see that? The person who killed Mrs. Bosworth will be watching you to find out what you may have discovered in the time you were here—" he waved a brown hand— "Perhaps nothing of

which you are conscious now; but later you may remember some little thing that was strange, was out of its accustomed place, which you cannot judge until the room is in its usual order." She looked skeptical, and Ismael added, "If you are hiding anything, I beg you, for your own sake to tell me now. Your life may depend upon it."

For a second his earnestness moved her almost to the point of telling him about the telegrams, about her horrible experience in Penang, but her faith in human nature had received too deadly a blow. She was no longer the trusting, friendly girl she had been when she left America—besides, her own Yankee shrewdness told her that the telegrams she had suppressed were of no moment except to herself, and to the fortunate Helene Chambers who was safely beyond reach of this tragic affair.

"I know nothing that the murderer need fear," Nancy declared. "If I did, at whatever cost to myself, I would tell you." She meant every word, and Ismael recognized the fact.

"Come, then, I will escort you to your room," he said, rising. Sobered by his solicitude, Nancy led the way into the deserted hall and along the corridor to the guest room where the rose-colored lights cast a pink glow across the white ceilings.

"Well, here I am," she said, turning at the door.

"One moment, please." Ismael entered the room ahead of her. Matter-of-factly he peered under the bed, opened the wardrobe and explored its damp depths, and then,

going to the window, glanced out before he firmly closed and fastened the shutters. "Now," he gravely motioned to her to enter, "you may rest easy. Be sure to lock your door, and do not open it again unless you hear the voice of Tuan McCleary or myself. If you want anything, you have only to call. I will hear you."

With his polite little bow, Ismael stepped outside and waited until he heard the bolt creak into place.

Nancy lowered her trembling figure into a wicker chair and stared around her. It had been an ordeal, talking to the detective, and her thoughts were still confused—one moment he seemed more sympathetic, more understanding than any one she had ever met; the next, he was an enemy against whom, despairingly, she was pitting all her puny wiles. Of one thing only did she feel convinced; that he was deeply concerned about her personal safety, and that was too incredible to grasp. Why would any one want to harm her? She knew nothing—all she had done was to keep the telegrams which she had absent-mindedly stuffed into her pocket; and certainly they could mean nothing to any one here except herself.

Suddenly, she started from her chair, realizing vaguely that something was missing from the room. Her shoes were gone. The muddy-white brogues she had worn earlier in the evening; they weren't beside the bed where she had left them, nor were they in the wardrobe either, she discovered after groping along its wooden floors and feeling the length of its dusty high shelf. It wasn't the loss

of the shoes themselves that worried her, inconvenient as that was apt to prove in her present state of bankruptcy, but the fact that wadded in the tissue paper with which she had stuffed the soggy toes were the torn bits of the telegrams and the three personal letters she had destroyed. Had the police taken them? Had one of the servants removed them for cleaning? Or, she shivered, had the murderer been there and carried them off? Why would he want them, except perhaps as a hold over her; to force her to help him! She knew now why all her instincts had revolted against this dark, lonely house. It wasn't because of its isolation; its somber silence; not because of the wild animals and snakes that lived close by, but because the most horrible thing in the world lurked within its damp, flimsy walls—murder.

CHAPTER IX

In the chill blackness of the hour preceding dawn, Ismael sat hunched over his notebook. The data he had collected during the past hours had been carefully inscribed in his precise handwriting, but they were cold facts—black and white—and until they had been dyed with the emotions behind this crime, they were meaningless to the little Malay. He had seen fear in the faces of those he had interviewed, had heard lies and evasions from every one, but he hadn't yet felt the forces of love or hatred. In other words, he thought, sucking the end of his stubby pencil, he had not yet been able to connect the atmosphere of this damp, isolated bungalow to any one person. His smile was involuntary, as he glanced across the room to the long Singapore chair where McCleary was sprawled, his mouth open, his red face peacefully upturned toward the blazing lights—how impossible to explain to this earnest white officer his own methods of crime deduction! How disgusted that conscientious, square-faced man would be if Ismael were to say, "Tuan, I smell murder on this estate, but I do not yet get the scent of the murderer." It was the sort of thing he never even risked saying to his own chief, although he some-

times thought that Campbell would come closer to understanding it than any other white man he had ever known. The little American girl he had talked to this evening had surprised him with her sensitiveness to impressions—she too had felt the horror of this house; she had differentiated between her fear of the darkness and of wild animals, and that of human beings; but she hadn't gone far enough.

McCleary stirred, as though conscious of Ismael's stare, and sheepishly opened his eye. "Ugh! must have dropped off," he muttered apologetically as he struggled into an upright position. "Discovered anything new in the bedroom, or in here?"

The Malay shook his head. "Nothing, Tuan. Too many people have been in here—and in the bedroom I found nothing to indicate a crime. I think Tuan Farnsworth was frightened and scrambled through the window, scratching himself as he went, and so making the blood marks. Apparently he had told all he knew, when he was brave with brandy—of what use to kill him under such difficult circumstances?"

"Well, I hope you're right, but I'd like to get my hands on the bloody young fool." McCleary swung his feet to the floor and stood up yawning. "Must be almost dawn—you can hear the birds. And there goes the tong-tong!" The notes of a deep bronze gong rose and fell on the damp, chilly air, echoing and re-echoing through the rubber trees.—Business as usual!

Ismael frowned. "I wish today was a holiday, Tuan. I do not like the thought of these people being scattered over countless hundreds of acres."

"You mean Bosworth and the assistants?" McCleary asked in a surprised tone, and then shrugged his broad, muscular shoulders. "They'll be all right. Remember, there are four hundred coolies on the estate. Anyway," he added briskly, "there's nothing we can do about it. I couldn't possibly get a constable to guard each of them, and if we stopped work here until we caught the murderer, we'd both be out of a job. The best we can do is to post a man at each bungalow, as we have done, and at the factory at night—which we have also done."

Ismael's smile was sardonic. "You white men with your teachings of the sacredness of human life!"

McCleary grinned. "Human life is only sacred in the home, Ismael, not in business. A few more crimes in the rubber industry would hardly be noticed."

Through the open window drifted the chatter of Malay servants, the clink of dishes, the sharp tang of wood smoke, blending with the fragrance of fresh coffee. From across the hall, they heard Sullivan's Irish voice, "Up ye get, ye spalpeen. The tong-tong's gone." There was an incoherent mutter of annoyance, and then Mike spoke again. "Sure you're goin' to work. It's meself that's tellin' you. You're through with loafin'."

McCleary grinned. "The pot calling the kettle black."

"A strange man, Tuan Sullivan," Ismael said, rising and stretching his cramped rotund body.

"What's next on the program?" McCleary asked, looking enviously at the Malay, who, despite his hard, sleepless night, looked as fresh and immaculate as ever. "I've got to have a bathe and a shave before I'll be good for anything."

"By the time breakfast is finished, it will be light," Ismael said. "Then I will try to find the elusive Farnsworth, and talk to the servants."

Half an hour later, Ismael, fortified by several cups of coffee, stepped out into the dampness of the new day. It was drizzling half-heartedly, and a blanket of mist shrouded the valley like a fog, obscuring all but the nearest rubber trees. Moving like a squat, bulky ghost, Ismael trotted down the muddy roadway, his sharp eyes picking out the tracks he had followed from beneath the bedroom window. The footsteps had been blurred and half obliterated by the marks of the barefooted servants, the boots of the constables, and the light, spasmodic drizzle, but the marks he was following, deep toe prints of a running man, appeared frequently enough to assure him that he had been correct in his surmise. As Ismael came out of the aisle of rubber trees into the clearing where the low rambling factory stood, the sleepy-eyed constable on duty saluted him.

"Is Tuan Hamilton awake?" the detective asked, pausing half way up the deep rutted drive.

"Sahaya, Tuan. He is bathing. A remarkable man, Tuan Hamilton—one moment drugged with whisky, then came the tong-tong, and I heard the engines start up. I went in and told him he must come with me, but he said he must bathe first, his head hurt, and I could wait outside for him."

"Did you tell him why he was wanted?" Ismael's tone was sharp.

"No, Tuan, he didn't ask me." The man's simple face beamed at his display of intelligence.

"Well, keep your eye on him, and tell him nothing. Just take him to your Tuan McCleary."

The constable saluted again, and with ill-concealed curiosity watched the detective disappear around the corner of the building, like a plump beagle hound on the trail of a rabbit. Ismael, oblivious of everything save those staggering toeprints, followed them to the back of the factory where they stopped abruptly beside the narrow mark of tires. The little Malay emitted a sigh of satisfaction; a bicycle had rested there against the dull, unpainted wall of the covered passage leading to the electric shed. Again he took up the trail. The tire marks swerved around the far side of the factory and returned to the road.

As he neared the coolie lines below the factory, Ismael met the first signs of activity; gangs of Malays, Chinese, Indians, clad in dirty, white shorts, or grimy g-strings, straggled past him, marshalled by sharp-voice mandurs. Wide brown eyes in yellow and brown faces stared at

him with childlike curiosity, and stood aside respectfully for him to pass—a Malay mata-mata (policeman) whose reputation was a matter of pride to natives throughout the length and breadth of Malaya. He would find the evil one who had killed the Mem, they whispered, for the news of Lydia's murder had spread through the usual underground route that made even the stupidest coolie aware of all that happened on the estate. The mandurs, as befitted the importance of their position, were the first to recover themselves, and with loud authority urged along the gangs of weeders and tappers.

The air around the native kampongs was heavy with the odorous weight of newly built fires, spices, dried fish and cocoanut oil, and in the doorways of the little woven bamboo huts, under the broad pale leaves of banana trees, or behind the blazing crimson of poinsetta hedges, Malay, Indian, and Chinese women paused in their household tasks to gaze round-eyed and solemn as he passed. "Why was the mata-mata walking so fast, with head downbent as though in prayer?"

Suddenly Ismael stopped, staring in perplexity at the tire marks. "This is wrong," he muttered to himself. "One track leading down toward the highway, as I expected, and then crossing it in places, another track leading off through the rubber. He must have come back then—but what happened to put him off the road?" With a new burst of speed, Ismael hurried along beside the narrow marks that bit deep in the reddish earth between the tall

trunks of serried rubber trees on the eastern side of the road. And then, through the thinning mist, he saw a crumpled white figure sprawled against a tree trunk.

It was Farnsworth, lanky, boyish legs twisted beside a wrecked bicycle, his suit a mass of mud and blood stains, his face cut and scratched beneath the swells of mosquito and insect bites. As Ismael stooped down to ascertain his injuries, Farnsworth opened blank blue eyes. "Go way, Semut," he croaked. "I'm too sick to work. Tell Tuan Mason——"

"Come, Tuan Farnsworth," Ismael said, putting an arm beneath the soggy shoulders, "try to get up."

At his touch the boy emitted a shriek of terror. "Don't kill me, don't kill me! I won't tell. I won't tell!"

"I won't hurt you," Ismael soothed. "I will help you. You are sick. You must go to your bed."

"My bed—not that other," the boy begged. "He will kill me there. Oh, God, he's after me!" His eyes stared wildly around at the tree trunks, and then, as though reassured at finding himself out of doors, he spoke coherently. "Don't know how I got here. Must get back to my own bed."

Pushing, tugging and coaxing, Ismael got him to his feet, and half carrying the limp form, staggered back to the road. The timely arrival of a passing bullock cart, reporting for work at the factory, solved the problem of transporting the injured man to the house. The surprised Malay driver helped to lift Farnsworth into the rough

wooden cart, and then, with Ismael walking behind, he whipped the bullock into a fast lumbering pace.

As the cart jolted back up the road, the constable who had been on guard at the factory came stumbling to meet it. "Tuan, Tuan," he gasped, his usually brown face a sickly yellow. "Tuan Hamilton is gone."

"What do you mean?" the detective asked. "How could that happen with you on guard?"

"He was bathing, Tuan, as I told you. I could hear the water splashing and splashing all the time, but he took so long that I went inside to tell him to hurry. The door was locked, and he didn't answer. Then I went outside and looked in the window—the shutters were open and no one was in the bathing room, just the water running from the pipe. I didn't know the water came so, I thought he must dip it from a jar."

"Fool! Imbecile!" Ismael exclaimed. "What sort of a policeman are you? Even a crocodile should have known better! Here, walk beside this cart and take this sick man to your Tuan. Tell him what happened. Allah help you, for no one else can, if you let this man get away from you!"

"Yes, please, Tuan," the constable said humbly. "I will guard him like my own poor soul."

"What a case!" Ismael groaned to himself as the driver swung his whip and the rough-hewn wheels of the cart lurched forward. "It is like a game of hide-and-go-seek. Always some one I must find before I can get down to any real work."

Turning, he hurried into the low, rambling building. In the grey twilight of its interior, he saw the skeleton frame of the weighing machine at the right of the door, and beyond the long row of empty vats waiting for the arrival of the latex. Great bottles of acid gleamed palely on the shelf above the vats, and on the opposite side of the long, low ceiling room, bulked the dark shapes of the massive rollers. From the room beyond, connected by a covered passage, the throb of gas engines generating electricity shook the building with regular pulsations.

On the left of the front door was a small, dusty office, containing a roll-top desk, a filing cabinet, a table and two chairs. Above the throbbing of the engines, Ismael could hear distinctly the splashing of water in the locked bathroom that opened off the little office.

Swiftly he whirled around and hurried through the factory, his dark eyes searching each nook and corner as he proceeded into the building containing the electric plant, then along a covered passage into the smoke room, through another passage into the packing shed. All were deserted. Glad to escape from the nauseating smell of rubber and lysol that permeated the factory, Ismael stepped through a rear door into the fresh air. The mist was disappearing, and although the air was still heavy, the drizzle had stopped, and the sun was struggling to break through its prison of clouds.

Underneath the bathroom window were the large, heavy footprints where the Scotch engineer had made his

escape. The man had walked fast—his strides were long, but they moved evenly, and in a direct purposeful line through the rubber trees. There was no attempt at concealment, no dodging or doubling. The aisles between the white-flecked trees were alive with moving brown and yellow figures, the weeders bent over their scraping hoes, the tappers with bright knives moving from tree to tree, and behind them other coolies emptying the white cups into big zinc pails.

Hamilton's footprints led in a diagonal line through the rubber to the rough, muddy ruts of the track that bisected the estate, leading from Harvy's bungalow on the east side of the main roadway, to the bungalow occupied by Pearson and Hamilton near the steamy, mangrove-choked river that formed the western boundary. "This is a waste of time," Ismael grumbled, as the footprints turned westward along the track. "The man has only gone to his bungalow to change his clothes, and the constable on guard there, unless he is as big a dolt as the one at the factory, will take charge of him."

He was aroused from his irritating thoughts by a shout, and looking up saw the slender, broad-shouldered figure of Bill Pearson coming toward him under the canopy of overhanging branches. "Looking for Hamilton, Inspector? He came along to the house about half an hour ago, and the constable rushed him up to McCleary."

"Thank you, Tuan." Ismael smiled at the attractive picture which Pearson unconsciously made in his khaki

shorts and shirt, his bronze face toning into the tan of his *terai* hat. "You saved me time and trouble. Now I can go with a free mind to the house of Tuan Bosworth. Are you coming my way?"

"Yes." Pearson adjusted his long stride to the Malay's short quick steps. "Harvy didn't show up at roll call, and I thought I'd go along and see how he was after I'd put my men to work. If he isn't feeling fit, I'll have to take over for him down at the factory. I hope McCleary won't hold Hamilton up long—the latex will be coming in now, and we're short-handed. Mason is taking over for Farnsworth."

"Tuan McCleary realizes the importance of rubber," Ismael said blandly. "He knows that nothing must stop the work on the estate, not even death."

Pearson glanced sharply at the expressionless face of the man beside him, and an unwilling smile twisted his lips. "It does sound heartless—but the estate really can't afford to slack off even for a day." He raised his head to stare up through the rising mist to the low, heavy grey sky. "I hope it clears up so that the coolies can work, but it doesn't look too good. We're way behind in our production for some reason or other, and the Board of Directors will tear their hair when they get this month's figures. If we don't speed up somehow, we'll all be on the dole." He changed the subject abruptly. "Mason tells me you've found Farnsworth."

For the thousandth time Ismael pondered the speed

and accuracy with which news traveled among the natives until it reached even the white bosses.

"Yes," he said noncommittally.

"Out of his head, so Mason heard, babbling about the murderer being after him. What do you suppose he was doing on the bicycle out in the midst of the rubber?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he was the murderer trying to escape. Perhaps he was trying to escape from the murderer," Ismael said absent-mindedly. He was too worried to pay much attention now to the man beside him. And he didn't know exactly why he was worried either—a depressed feeling that something was wrong, and that there was something he ought to do immediately.

They had reached the main road running north toward the Bosworth bungalow, and south past the factory and the kampongs, to the highway. The little Malay stood hesitating, his smooth brown forehead wrinkled into a furrow.

"You just follow the road up the hill," Pearson volunteered. Ismael paid no attention to him, he was staring with dark, troubled eyes along the continuation of the rough track winding between rubber and jungle. Something was urging him to follow that track, but with the knowledge of all the work awaiting him at the bungalow, he struggled against it. He knew now what was troubling him: the fact that Harvy had not appeared at roll call. There might be a dozen reasons for his delinquency, but none of them tallied with the impression Ismael had of

the sober, conscientious Englishman he had talked to—the man who was the real backbone of the estate, who cherished it even above his wife.

Automatically, Ismael crossed the road and hurried along the rutted track. The crude road, just wide enough to permit the passage of the Harvy automobile, was a feeble demonstration of the conflict between man and nature. On the left marched row upon row of symmetrical rubber trees, with their white cups attached by wire to the trunks, their bark disfigured with markings; circles, dot—arrows. On the right, a patch of uncleared jungle lapped its dark sinister tongue, in the form of thickets and lianas, along the very edge of the road.

“We’re going to clear this patch out next week,” Bill Pearson volunteered, looking resentfully at the tangled mass of rattan and bamboo, which, knotted together with lianas, rose in a defiant wall. “This patch, and one like it up between my division and Mason’s are the last on the estate. The State Forestry Reserves just about circle us, though, so it won’t spoil the hunting—” He broke off abruptly. “What’s up?”

Without replying, Ismael broke into a run. Through the overhanging trees Bill Pearson too caught a glimpse of something white on the ground beneath a dark mass of thicket. His face paled under its tan as he sped after the Malay. It was just a gleam of something white he had seen, but it was out of place; whatever it was it had no business to be there at the edge of the jungle. He re-

fused to acknowledge the fear that hammered at him; he only knew that the estate and the jungle were places of browns and greens and greys; green trees, brown trunks, brown earth, brown natives; grey g-strings and shorts. White was the color of civilization—white was worn by white men, by white women.

Ismael's squat figure was crouched beside the white patch now, blocking Pearson's view. Not that Bill wanted to see; and yet he had to know. Anything was better than this horrible, gnawing suspense.

"What is it?" Pearson's words came in gulps—"Oh, God—not——?"

Ismael turned a grey, haunted face toward him. "Get McCleary," he ordered in a harsh, unnatural voice. "Tell him that Mr. Harvy has been killed—stabbed in the back."

CHAPTER X

It was the sound of running feet, of deep vibrant voices that aroused Nancy from the drugged sleep into which she had finally fallen. She had been dreaming of home—of bright autumn foliage, of white houses facing elm-shaded streets, of the classic red-brick college buildings on the hill, and she lay bewildered for several minutes after she opened her eyes, trying to remember where she was.

Daylight creeping through the shutters fell in even, greyish bars on the mattinged floor, and in the dim light she distinguished, through the veil of mosquito netting, the unfamiliar furnishings of Lydia's guest room. Nancy shivered and pulled the sheet higher around her shoulders as though to shield herself from the tide of hateful memories that swept over her. She mustn't think about Penang—if she once started to relive that ghastly experience, she wouldn't have the courage to carry on. It was even better to think about Lydia's murder, and the fact that she herself might actually be in danger, as the funny little Malay detective had hinted. Here at least she had nothing with which to reproach herself; she couldn't help anything that had happened in this horrible house, ex-

cept, of course, that she had taken advantage of their mistake in her identity. And that didn't harm any one. Later, after Ismael had caught the murderer, she could explain—strange how sure she was that the absurd little man would succeed where McCleary had failed. Had it been he who had taken her shoes and found the papers, or had it been one of the servants? Last night, in her upset state she had thought it might even have been the murderer, but now, in the cold light of morning, that theory seemed fantastic. She was a stranger; why should he worry about her? She knew nothing; if she had, she would have turned him over to Ismael with a smile on her face. Poor Lydia. Her gaze brooded somberly on the bowl of flowers beside her bed. It must have been almost the last thing Lydia had done—to add that welcoming touch. She hadn't thought of it before, but now it seemed a message. Lydia had known she was coming, had wanted her. Nancy's heart felt lighter, almost as though Lydia had spoken to her—as perhaps she had.

Half an hour later, bathed and carefully dressed in white linen whose crispness had been wilted by the damp, she wandered through the hall toward the front veranda. The door of the Bosworth bedroom was closed, and a constable was on guard there—a determined-looking little Malay who stared at her suspiciously as she passed. From inside the room came muffled babblings, sometimes shrill, insistent, sometimes low, but always incoherent.

"Tuan Farnsworth?" she asked.

"Sahaya, Mem," the constable answered, straightening himself as though he feared she would try to enter the room.

With a nod, she passed on. Where had Farnsworth gone last night, she wondered, and how did Ismael find him when no one else had been able to?

The living room was deserted, but a white-coated Malay boy was lazily swishing a cloth and mop around, raising clouds of dust which glimmered in the grey light for a second before settling in a new location. "I'd show him what for, if this was my house," Nancy grumbled, all her New England ancestry outraged by his methods; and then her indignation faded under his broad smile of welcome, "Tabeh Mem, ada copee?" He dropped his mop and duster, and padded eagerly past her toward the kitchen.

The dining room was still dressed up in its lace and silver—a sad reminder of the supper party which had never taken place. Hurriedly Nancy stepped out onto the veranda, and stood drinking in the beauty of the scene before her. Beyond the wet, blackened gravel of the driveway was a strip of carefully tended lawn, as soft and green as plush, and then a series of three terraces riotous with flowers, sending up wave after wave of perfume, dazzling the eyes with their color. Below the flower beds stretched the dark, shining green of hundreds of rubber trees receding into the mist that still hung over the valley.

So absorbed was she in her surroundings that she was

quite unconscious of the long, grim-faced man who was watching her from the depths of a wicker chair, or of the Malay constable squatting on the steps below her. "Hrrumph! and who might you be?" a Scottish voice broke in upon her pleasure.

Startled, she whirled around and stared down at the indolent figure in the crumpled white suit. His red-rimmed eyes looked hollow in the long, dusty brown face, and there were freckles on the tanned bald spot above the close-cut grey hair. Was he another policeman?

"Th' name's Hamilton, if that means anything to you," he said sardonically, "and after you tell me who you are and what you're doing here, I'd be pleased to hear what all this fuss is about that's keepin' me frae m' wurrk."

Nancy smiled at the indignation in his voice. "I'm a friend of Lydia's. I got here last night. My name is—" she caught her breath a little—"Helene Chambers."

"Yus, she was speakin' about you yestere'en," Hamilton nodded, and brought his heavy grey eyebrows together in a frown. "But 'twas not like you are she described you."

Nancy's hazel eyes darkened in alarm. What had Lydia told this disagreeable old man about Helene that made him challenge her identity? "What did she say about me?" she asked, forcing a friendly smile to her unwilling lips.

"That's neither here nor there," he grunted, hitching his chair around so that he might stare at her more comfortably from beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

"Well, it doesn't matter." Nancy shrugged her slim shoulders in assumed indifference. "She was probably just spoofing you. Anyway, I understood that you didn't like each other."

He was taken aback by her frankness, she noticed with satisfaction. "Not at furst, we didna," he admitted. "I let nae one mind my business for me—but after she'd learnt her lesson, she was none sae bad for a woman."

Nancy bit her lip at his masculine complacency, but before she could reply, the houseboy pattered out on the veranda bearing a large tray.

"Put it over there, awa' frae me," Hamilton barked. "I don't want to see nor smell the stuff." He turned his aching head away as the boy hurried to place a table at a careful distance from him.

"Won't you have some coffee?" Nancy asked maliciously. "I've always heard that coffee was a good antidote for too much whisky. My, those eggs and bacon smell delicious!"

Hamilton choked back his nausea at the thought of them, but he said nothing until Nancy had seated herself.

"Noo, then. Tell me what deil's wurrk went on here last night," he commanded. "Nary a wurrd of sense can I mak oot o' it. McCleary was juist aboot to tell me when up runs Pearson, eyes goggling oot o' his face, and whisks McCleary awa wi'oot sae much as a by your please."

"Somebody killed Lydia," Nancy said, suddenly ashamed that she could eat and drink with such zest.

"Sae mooch I gathered—" the Scotchman's tone was dry. "'Tis the who and how and why I'm wantin' to ken."

"She was stabbed. That's all I really know. The police think that some one on the estate must have done it—a white man, not a native," she added, watching him closely over the rim of her coffee cup.

His brown sandstone face didn't change its expression, but his shrewd grey eyes narrowed. "Noo, who wad be like to do such a thing?" he mused aloud.

"Who do you think?" Nancy asked. "You know all these people here better than I do."

Caution veiled the brightness of his eyes, and his voice was cold. "I dinna ken mooch aboot them. I mind my ane business, and if every one else did the same, the wurrl'd wad be the better for it."

Nancy flushed angrily at his words, but before she could find a sufficiently crushing retort, a white topee appeared below the vine-draped railing of the veranda, and Jim Mason ran breathlessly up the steps. "What's this about Harvy being killed?" he demanded.

"Mr. Harvy killed!" Nancy exclaimed, her cup slipping from her nerveless fingers to smash in a brown puddle on the white cloth.

"Ye're daft, mon," Hamilton growled. "'Twas Mrs. Bosworth was killed, not John."

"John too—they found him just a little while ago, my mandur told me. Stabbed in the back. He was lying on

the edge of the jungle—must have happened when he was on his way to roll call.”

“Sae that’s why Pearson came after McCleary,” Hamilton muttered. “Sma’ wonder he looked as if he’d seen a ghost.”

“I suppose they took him up to his own bungalow,” Mason said. “I thought they might have brought him here. Good Lord! It’s unbelievable. Who’d want to kill poor old John?” Jim dropped limply into a chair beside Nancy. The girl looked white and shaken, and he felt a pang of compunction at his tactlessness. “I’m sorry, Helene,” he said softly, reaching out to pat her cold fingers. “I thought of course you knew about it, or I wouldn’t have come bursting up here the way I did.”

“No, I didn’t know—I just got up.” She pushed her chair back from the table with a gesture of repugnance.

“Wait, I’ll get rid of that debris for you. Hey, boy!” he called, and an alert young Malay appeared. “Makanan habis bawa pergi pinggan semua.”

“How about a drink, old man?” he asked Hamilton as the boy began to stack the dishes on his tray. “I could do with one, and I’ll bet you could.”

“I’m needin’ it bad,” the Scotchman admitted. He’d liked John Harvy, and in spite of his reluctance he’d come to like Lydia too. He kept seeing her as she had stood in the doorway of the factory yesterday, the sun making a halo of her fair hair. Perhaps if he hadn’t been

drunk last night, he might have saved her. His big-knuckled hands clenched.

"Kasseh dua whisky soda, besar," Jim murmured to the boy.

A light rain began to rustle on the atap roof and drip from the overhanging eaves. Jim frowned. "More rain. Damn this climate—there go the coolies." He stared morosely at the group of natives hurrying for shelter.

"It's the awful uncertainty," Nancy burst out; "not knowing who did it, or who will be next." She shivered.

"You don't have to worry anyway," Jim assured her. "I imagine Harvy was killed because he knew who had killed Lydia, and the murderer was afraid he'd tell the police. You haven't any idea who killed her, have you? Not hiding his identity under those brown curls of yours, are you?" He was smiling, but his eyes were anxious.

"No, I have no idea," Nancy said frankly. "If I had I'd have told Ismael last night. I'd like to see the brute, whoever he is, boiled in oil. Poor Lydia—she never hurt any one in her life, and I don't believe Mr. Harvy did either. It's a horrible world where such things can happen to people like them."

"What price virtue?" Jim sighed, and then turning to Hamilton asked, "Have you any ideas on the subject?"

"Nay—I know naething. I was drunk last night, and I'm wishing I was drunk noo."

Ignoring the rain which was streaming from the edges of his terai, and darkening his khaki shirt, Bill Pearson

came slowly along the driveway, his shoulders bent like an old man's. Wearily, he climbed the steps, and without a word dropped into the nearest chair. His face was still goodlooking in spite of its haggardness, Nancy thought resentfully.

The houseboy appeared with tall clinking glasses, and Jim motioned for him to give one to Bill. "Take a swig of that, old man—and then tell us what happened."

Absent-mindedly Bill drained his glass, and then raising his head for the first time, seemed aware of the other people on the veranda.

"Sorry, Miss Chambers," he said with an apologetic smile. "It's such a ghastly thing. Finding poor old John like that, and then breaking the news to Betty."

"How is she?" Nancy asked, forgetting her distrust of the other woman in a rush of sympathy. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Not just now. Perhaps later." He hesitated and then said bitterly, "She didn't want any one but Clive. I sent for him, and he and Mike are with her now."

Hamilton turned his head, and the eyes of the two men met in silent understanding.

"Not wasting any time, is she?" Jim Mason said with a cynical smile, and then, as though dismissing Betty, asked quickly, "How did you happen to find him, Bill? What do Ismael and McCleary make of it?"

"I don't know what they think," Bill said. "I was walking along with Ismael when he noticed the body."

Funny thing—it was just John's white sleeve that showed, and you could see it from only one point in the road—the rest of the body was hidden in the bushes. He sent me along for McCleary, and together we carried John up to the house." His lips tightened at the thought of that journey; John had been a heavy burden, a lifeless weight rolling from side to side on the crude litter they had fashioned. "They sent me in to tell Betty. She couldn't believe it, of course. Seems she'd gotten up early and walked part way with John. She blames herself for having left him."

Hamilton looked up sharply. "What for was she sae early up, and walkin' wi' John?"

"Don't ask me," Bill shrugged. "Couldn't sleep, perhaps."

"What I don't see is how any one could have slipped up on John without his noticing it," Jim Mason said thoughtfully.

"Easy enough, along that track. It was very misty early this morning, remember, could hardly see your hand before your face. John is, or was, an absent-minded beggar—wouldn't expect to meet any one. Here come Clive and Mike now!" His voice changed as the two friends hurried through the sheets of rain that were now bouncing on the gravel driveway.

"What's the latest news?" Jim asked while the newcomers were still on the steps.

Clive, with the old dazed expression on his white,

strained face, walked into the house without replying, but Mike said shortly, "I don't know. Doc Sparkes is there. Ismael and McCleary aren't saying much—just asked Clive and me where we'd been this morning, and what we'd done. I suppose they are trying to eliminate as many suspects as they can, but as nearly as I've been able to figure, every one's in for it—even Farnsworth, and Hamilton here."

"Eh, what's that ye're sayin'?" the Scotchman growled. "I had naething to do wi' all this."

Mike's grin was malicious. "It's up to you to prove it then, and unless you have a better alibi than I think you have, you're in the same boat as the rest of us." His cat-green eyes shifted away from Hamilton's indignant face, to rest on Nancy, and his expression softened. "All, that is, except Miss Chambers. She seems to be in the clear. That's the reward of an easy conscience. You sleep late and have no time to slip around in the mist sticking knives in people's backs."

"Oh, don't," Nancy said with a shiver. "How can you be so heartless!" Her eyes flashed their dislike of the man who could sit there so easily taunting them all.

Clive Bosworth, looking more than ever like a sleep-walker, came slowly out onto the veranda and, after glancing about uncertainly, dropped into the empty chair which Mike pushed toward him.

"How about footprints?" Jim Mason asked. "Did they get a look at any before this last shower came up?"

"I don't know," Bill Pearson answered doubtfully. "The coolies had been along part of the road, and their bare feet were all over the place. I didn't think to look for marks near the body, but I suppose Ismael had a look-see while I went for McCleary. He's too clever to overlook a bet like that."

Mike Sullivan yawned, and swung his long legs up onto the Singapore chair which creaked dismally as he settled himself back in its embrace. "Personally, if I had been wanting to slip up on Harvy, I wouldn't have risked meeting him face to face. I'd have gone along the path through the jungle—there's a trail there that the natives use, you know——"

"You seem to know all about it," Jim Mason said sharply.

"Sure, and why wouldn't I?" Mike grinned. "I've got eyes, and I've got brains. Every one here knows about that path, and unless I'm very much mistaken some one of us used it this morning."

There was a sudden silence. With a shock Nancy grasped the full intent of his words; one of the men sitting there on the veranda with her was the murderer. Her eyes, bright with suspicion, searched their faces for some sign of abnormality. Was it Mike Sullivan, lying there with a mocking smile still lingering around his lips? Was it Clive Bosworth, whose yellow head was resting so despairingly on his hand? Was it Bill Pearson, who was staring stonily over her head at some unseen horror? Was

it the disagreeable Scotchman, whose inscrutable face betrayed absolutely nothing of his feelings? Or was it Jim Mason, whose quick blue eyes were scanning each of the other men, as she herself was doing?

It couldn't be any of them, she decided. They all looked so normal, in spite of the horror and the strain. It must be Dave Farnsworth, she thought, or perhaps even Betty Harvy. Then impatient at herself, she shrugged. She always decided that it was some one who wasn't present. Last night she had been sure it must be Hamilton, simply because he wasn't there to disarm her with his presence. And now, watching these people on the veranda she couldn't bring herself to believe such evil of any of them.

She was glad she wasn't a detective, she decided, her thoughts turning to the little Malay upon whose shoulders rested the task of ferreting out the murderer. It was strange, Ismael had seemed to have a presentiment last night of danger, only he had feared for her safety, not for John Harvy's. What had he said to her? "Do not go anywhere alone with any one, under any circumstances. Keep your shutters closed and your door locked when you are in your room." If he had given that advice to Mr. Harvy, the poor man might still be alive. Why did Ismael think that Nancy was in danger? Something about the possibility that she had the clue to the murderer's identity, just because she had been the first on the scene. Well, he was wrong—she'd gone over and over all that

she had done and seen, and there was nothing—all she had done was to hide the telegrams and let people think she was Helene Chambers. Surely that was something that could concern only herself. It had been sheer luck that she had found the telegrams lying on the table where Lydia had left them, and that no one except Lydia had known of their arrival.

Suddenly all the color drained from her face, and she swallowed hastily to choke back the exclamation that trembled on her pale lips. O God! why hadn't she thought of that before? She felt overwhelmed at the ugliness of the fact that had so suddenly confronted her. Here she had been acting blindly on the assumption that only Lydia had seen the telegrams, and she had been wrong. The murderer knew who she was. Even if Lydia hadn't told him of the change in Helene's plans, and of Nancy's arrival, he would never have overlooked the telegrams lying openly on the table. Whoever knew that she was Nancy Reynolds, and not Helene Chambers, was the murderer.

Once more she scanned the faces of the men around her. What had they said to her? How had they acted? Frantically she tried to remember. Mike Sullivan had been skeptical about the time of her arrival and what she had done in the house. Jim Mason had asked her just a few moments ago whether she knew anything about the murderer. Mr. Hamilton had openly questioned her identity. Bill Pearson had spoken to her only once or

twice, but he watched her a lot—as he was watching her now. Hurriedly she lowered her long lashes. Betty Harvy had implied that Nancy was unwelcome. Clive Bosworth, and Farnsworth—well, she didn't know what their attitude had been. Certainly at first Clive had ignored her, as he might any intruder—it wasn't until she had appealed to him directly that he had acknowledged her as a guest.

It was all very confusing, but one thing was certain, sooner or later the murderer would betray his knowledge of her identity. If she could lead each of the men on to talk to her, if she played her part cleverly enough, she would be able to point him out to the detectives. The realization that she alone had a clue to the murderer was so intoxicating that a confident smile curved her lips. All she had to do, she thought, was to be sweet and sympathetic to these lonely men, listen to them, watch them, and then when the murderer had been lured into betraying himself—her hands clenched themselves fiercely at the thought of her triumph.

It wasn't until much later that Nancy was to remember Ismael's warning, and to realize, when it was too late, that she had been playing directly into the murderer's hands.

CHAPTER XI

Ismael, plodding slowly along the muddy road, was too engrossed in the gloom of his thoughts to notice the rain beating on his shoulders, streaming from his sun helmet in warm trickles down the neck of his khaki tunic. "Surely, Allah," he protested, "these tears of yours are unnecessary. For a week now you have wept each day until the rice paddies are flooded, and your children sit in idleness watching their crops wash away. If you were again moved to tears today, why could you not have waited but a brief hour before you gave way—time to you is nothing; but to your humble servant here it is everything. One short hour, and I might have discovered the son of Shaitan who is working this evil among us!" The little Malay sighed, and then continued his childish arraignment of his deity. "And why, O Allah, with your infinite wisdom, did you trouble to create so witless a creature as the Constable Karimun?" Words failed him as he thought of the policeman he had sent to guard the spot where John Harvy's body had been found—the stupid Malay, who, at the first warm drops of rain, had taken shelter in the underbrush, and had been so busy protecting his empty head from the down-

pour that he had made no effort to preserve the precious footprints he had been set to watch.

"Why did you not then cover them, son of a pig?" Ismael had thundered when he had been at last free to hurry to the jungle's edge. The constable had peered up at him through the screen of wet foliage with stupid oxlike eyes and murmured piously, "It was the will of Allah, Tuan, to wash them away. He sent the aya panas (literally, hot rain; figuratively, blood of warriors). It would have been bad luck to interfere."

With an exclamation of disgust, Ismael turned away from the cowering native, squatting under his crude shelter at the edge of the jungle. The marks had all been smoothed into an even surface of mud—the footprints behind the tree where the murderer had lain in wait for John Harvy, the marks where his body had been dragged from the road into the underbrush, the footprints around the body, and the tracks which the murderer had made coming and going along the jungle path.

The rain had started while Ismael was busy questioning Mrs. Harvy and the servants, as he waited for Doctor Sparkes to make his examination, and he had had no time to examine the footprints at the scene of the crime. Having put a constable in charge, he had made the mistake of assuming that the man would do his job—he had been used to the trained co-operation of a corps of conscientious helpers in Johore, and the stupidity of the local police here handicapped him at every turn. There

was so much to do, and he was fast realizing that none of the duties could be relegated to any one else.

It was strange about that kris of Tuan Mason's. Doctor Sparkes had said it fitted the wound in Mrs. Bosworth's as well as that in Mr. Harvy's body, like a sheath, and yet, it hadn't been used even in the first murder. And in the second, there could be no question, for it was still in the desk in the Bosworth living room, where Ismael himself had locked it. But that was only one of the many queer angles to this case.

There was little use, he admitted, in going now to the place where he had found Tuan Farnsworth; the imprint of the bicycle tires would have been beaten out by the rain, but there was a dim chance that some friendly tree or bush might have preserved some of the marks, and it might still be possible to discover from them what had happened to the unstable young American.

The factory was crowded with peering natives as he passed it, but there was no sign of life in the kampong, where the women and children cowered indoors away from the "evil" warm rain. The rubber tree under which he had found Farnsworth still bore the scars of the impact, and the twisted, useless frame lay in its same resting place, but the marks of the tires had been washed away. Slowly, methodically, Ismael searched the sodden ground between the rubber trees, but it was not until he reached the narrow opening in the almost impenetrable barrier of jungle that he found a fresh scratch on the

tall, smooth trunk of a tree where a pedal might have scraped it. Search as he might, he found nothing else to enlighten him about Farnsworth's movements. Had he alighted and gone along the jungle path to come out on the other side of that primitive path, or had he been riding around aimlessly during the hours he had been missing? How had he wrecked the bicycle? Had he run into a tree as Ismael at first supposed, or had he been struck from behind by the man who had murdered Harvy? Or, was Farnsworth the killer, and his own disaster just an accident caused by the mist?

Some one had certainly been along that path, Ismael decided as he pushed his way carefully through the creepers and trailing vines, shouldering aside the wet leaves and clutching brambles while his feet sank deep in black, sucking mud. A twig was broken here, a fresh leaf was pressed into the black soil there, but the rain had obliterated any footprints that might have been retained in the swampy ground. Monkeys scolded overhead, a dainty mouse deer peered curiously at him from behind a clump of rattan, a snake slithered across the path; the underbrush was alive with twitterings and murmurs of bright-hued birds, the squeaks and squeals of small startled animals, but there was nothing to identify the merciless killer who had passed that way.

"Go and report to Tuan McCleary," Ismael ordered the constable, who with an exclamation of fright had jumped to his feet, clutching his baton, as the detective

silently emerged from the jungle behind him. "You are a fool and a coward. You are no use to me."

McCleary was restlessly pacing the veranda of the Harvy bungalow, his red face scowled with worry; his dark hair upended showed the passage of blunt, nervous fingers. "Where did you disappear to?" he asked in an irritable tone as Ismael clumped up the steps. Without waiting for a reply, he continued in a husky whisper, "I think we've got a case against Bosworth and Mrs. Harvy. I found an insurance policy making her the beneficiary to the tune of ten thousand pounds. I put the screws on her maid and some of the servants, and they admitted that Bosworth was her lover, had been ever since Mrs. Bosworth took that trip home. Today, for the first time since the servants have been here, she got up in time for breakfast with Harvy, and walked down the road with him. At first she said it was because she was frightened and upset, and then she admitted that she hoped to see Bosworth, said she was worried about him. Pretty thin, eh?" His broad mouth stretched into a grim smile. "Let's go along and question Bosworth. Strike while the iron is hot."

"One moment, Tuan," Ismael said. "I think first it would be well to send some cables."

"Cables?" McCleary looked blank. "Where to? What for?"

"To London, and to New York. We should know more about these people, and, since they will not tell us about themselves, I want to know what they are hiding."

"I don't see that that will help us much," McCleary protested; "Bosworth and Mrs. Harvy are the only ones who had a motive. Bosworth was tired of his wife, and she was anxious to get rid of her husband. By removing them both, the road is clear, and they have ten thousand pounds to boot."

"Nevertheless, Tuan, I think the cables should go," Ismael insisted, and then, noticing the stubborn set of McCleary's heavy jaw, he added tactfully, "If Scotland Yard tells us that the Semang Rubber Estate is in good shape, that Hamilton, Harvy, Mrs. Harvy, Bosworth, and Sullivan have nothing in their past lives to conceal; and if the New York police can find nothing against Mason, Pearson, Farnsworth, and Miss Chambers, then we will know that the crime had its roots here on the estate, that it did not creep from out of the past."

McCleary's nod was reluctant. "I don't suppose it can do any harm—may clear away some of the lies and evasions; but I don't think you'll find out anything of real value. This is a clear case of lust and greed." The detective's face was eloquent of his opinion of the motives.

Ismael, taking advantage of McCleary's reluctant agreement, hurried into the deserted Harvy living room, and with an exclamation of annoyance removed the silken doll that prissily concealed the telephone. The room, with its dark-shaded lamps, its incense, its low, black satin divans heaped with ornate pillows, was as

frivolously out of place on the rubber estate as the futile, scatter-brained woman who had staged it.

Half an hour later, Ismael and McCleary were seated in the damp, mildewed room beneath the Bosworth bungalow—Clive's office—and Clive himself, white and shaken, was facing them from across his flat-topped desk. "I tell you, I don't know anything about Harvy's murder, any more than I know who killed Lydia. I don't know how the estate will manage without him—my God! he was the estate. He ought to have been the manager. He knew more about rubber in ten minutes than I'll ever know." Clive buried his tousled head in his hands.

"What did you do this morning?" McCleary asked in a businesslike tone.

"Nothing. I haven't done a damned thing. Been too upset."

"That isn't what I mean. I want to know where you went, whom you saw, what you did; everything, from the time you got up, until now."

Clive lifted his head. "I got up at four thirty when Mike routed me out for roll call. We had breakfast on the porch. When the second tong-tong sounded, we started down toward the coolie lines. Then I remembered that Harvy had given me some papers yesterday that he wanted me to go over. I was supposed to read them, and return them to him this morning. I thought I'd better get them and glance over his notes; he'd been pretty insistent, and he'd kick up a fuss if he found I

hadn't had time to go over them. I told Mike to go on, and I ran back here. I'd left the papers on this desk, but when I got here, I couldn't find them. Then I suddenly saw Lydia lying on the settee over there, and it gave me such a turn, I nearly collapsed. I got outside, and was sick. When I got to the factory, roll call was over, and I saw the coolies going to work. Pearson and Mason came up and said that Harvy hadn't put in an appearance. I didn't think much about it then, though it was very unusual—still everything was topsy-turvy—we were busy planning the work, short-handed, you know, on account of Farnsworth. Mason offered to take over Farnsworth's division this morning, and Pearson was to take it this afternoon. I went into the factory to see how things were going there. Josephs, the half-caste clerk, said he could handle the place until Hamilton got there, so I started out to make the inspection rounds. I was over in Mason's sector when Harvy's boy caught up to me and told me that Harvy was dead, and that Betty—er, Mrs. Harvy—wanted to see me. Mike went along with me, and, well, you were there, so you know the rest. When Doctor Sparkes gave her something to quiet her down, we came back here. It had started to rain, and the coolies always quit then, so there was no point in trying to work—I was too upset to be any good, anyway."

McCleary's glance at Ismael was exultant. Clive hadn't an alibi for the vital moments when Harvy had been killed.

"Did you see any one, Tuan, when you came back to look for the papers?" the Malay asked.

"No, I came right in here through the outside door. No one ever comes here except in my office hours; then, of course, there is a string of coolies—but that is later in the morning. One of the house boys is supposed to clean, but he hadn't gotten around to it—it's just the way it was yesterday, now that they've taken Lydia's body away." He glanced distastefully around the dirt-tracked floor and dust-filmed furniture.

"You didn't go upstairs to look for the papers?" Ismael persisted.

"No, I just looked here, where I'd left them, and when I suddenly saw Lydia lying there on that settee, everything else went out of my head. Anyway, Harvy probably took them."

"What were the papers like, Tuan?" Ismael asked.

"Oh, just papers," Clive said vaguely. "Notes, you know—some writing and a lot of figures. They were on two pieces of blue paper, clipped together. He had some crazy system—blue pad for one thing; yellow pad for another, and so on—I never paid much attention."

The Malay leaned forward eagerly. "What did he use blue paper for, Tuan, can you remember?"

"Blue was for anything dealing with production, I believe. Yellow I know was for labor."

"There was nothing like that among Harvy's stuff," McCleary stated. "I went through everything he owned."

"Maybe he destroyed it, changed his mind or something," Clive volunteered. "All I know is that he gave it to me, and I put it right here." He thumped the desk. "And it was gone when I looked for it." Restlessly he began pulling out desk drawers, shifting books and papers, feeling into crevices, while McCleary watched him impatiently. "Here, that's no way to look for anything," he exclaimed. "Let me get there." Even the Inspector's systematic search, however, failed to produce the missing papers. "I don't suppose they matter, anyway," McCleary announced. "We're just wasting our time." He turned abruptly to Clive.

"Did you know that Mrs. Harvy walked part way with her husband this morning?"

The Englishman nodded indifferently. "Yes, she said that if she had only gone on with him instead of turning back to the house, he'd be alive now. That's what's worrying her. I told her it was no use reproaching herself; I'd felt the same way about having left Lydia, and Mike had said it wouldn't have made any difference—the murderer would have killed her the first time he'd caught her alone."

"Oh, so Mike Sullivan told you that, did he? And how did he know so much about the murderer?"

"Mike doesn't know—he just figured that if it was important to kill Lydia, the murderer would do it the first chance he got."

"Why do you think they were killed—Mrs. Bosworth

and Mr. Harvy?" Ismael asked before McCleary could say anything more.

"That's what I'd like to know," Clive said thoughtfully. "I can't see for the life of me why any one would want to kill either of them. Whoever did it must be crazy—just wanted to kill for the sake of killing—like an amok, you know, only an amok keeps on in one single tear until he's killed himself." Clive looked rather pleased with his theory, until Ismael said quietly, "A mania such as that would show itself, I think, Tuan. Have you noticed anything strange in the behavior of your friends?"

Clive's face fell. "No, and I've been watching for some sign. Damn awful feeling, if you know what I mean—thinking some one you know might stick a knife into any one at any minute. But every one seems so normal. Puts my wind up a bit. I mean any one who is crazy enough to go around killing people ought to show it—and nobody does."

McCleary shook his head impatiently. "That's all nonsense. The person who committed these murders did it in cold blood, and had a reason for both of them. Once we get hold of that, we'll have the murderer." His small dark eyes narrowed into slits, and his voice was harsh as he said meaningly, "So far, you and Mrs. Harvy are the only ones who have gained by the murders."

Clive's body jerked in surprise. "Why, what do you mean? What have I gained? You don't think I had any-

thing to do with it, do you? Or Betty? Why— Good Lord—” words seemed to fail him.

Ismael frowned, but ignoring him McCleary continued, “You are lovers, you and Mrs. Harvy. You want to get married. The two people who stood in your way were both killed, and—Mrs. Harvy will get ten thousand pounds, perhaps twenty thousand, if there was double indemnity!”

Clive gasped, his face flushed a deep scarlet, and then grew ghastly while a cold perspiration stood out in visible drops on his forehead. “No! No! you’re wrong. You can’t believe that. I wouldn’t have touched Lydia or John—I was a’fully fond of them both. I did make an ass of myself over Betty—but that’s the worst that can be said of me—I never once thought of marrying her— Oh, you must believe me!” His blue eyes held a hurt expression, like a child who had been unjustly accused and realized his helplessness.

Ismael intervened before McCleary could say anything more. “I think, Tuan, we should talk to some of the other people—Tuan Hamilton is impatient to go to the factory—and we have much to do.”

McCleary frowned at the interruption, but something in the expression of the little Malay checked the recitation of the evidence against the estate manager. McCleary, strangely enough, felt no pity for the man who had been his friend; in his opinion Clive had outraged every code of decency, forfeited every right for consid-

eration. "All right," the officer said gruffly. "You can go now, Bosworth. Tell Hamilton to step down here."

As Clive stumbled from the room, McCleary glowered at Ismael. "Why did you stop me? The bastard's as guilty as hell. I'd have gotten a confession out of him in another half hour. And to think I used to regard him as a friend!"

"I don't think you would have had a confession, Tuan," Ismael said calmly. "If he was the guilty one, if he planned and carried out these murders, he is too cold and calculating to be frightened into an admission. You really have no case against him, you know, nothing but a motive. Unless you can place him at the scene of the crimes, it is worse than useless to arrest him." His voice softened. "You are taking this case too hard, Tuan—it comes too close to you, and in your anxiety to do your duty, you lose your perspective."

The long, lanky figure of the Scotch engineer, entering the doorway, prevented further discussion. "It's about time ye got ovver ye're business wi' me," Hamilton growled. "Keepin' me frae my wurrk wi' yer dilly-dallying." He seated himself gingerly on the edge of a chair, his dour face expressionless. "Weel, get on wi' it."

"Tell us what you did last evening, Tuan," Ismael said, after waiting vainly for the white officer to speak. McCleary obviously had taken his implied criticism of harshness to heart.

"I did naething. I was drunk," the Scotchman said bluntly.

"Why were you drunk?"

"And why not?" Hamilton asked. "A sturrm outside, twa guid bottles of whisky at ma elbow. Wha wad ye hae me do?"

Ismael stared at him without speaking, and after a moment's uncomfortable silence, the engineer said cautiously, "I'm not sayin' I meant to get drunk, ye ken. No, I was coming up here later for some kedgereee. It was juist a drink or twa I was meanin' to tak—to pass the time. And the next thing I knew the tong-tong was beating as loud as if it was in ma head."

"When did you see Mrs. Bosworth last?"

"Yesterday forenoon," Hamilton said promptly. "She stopped by the factory to mind me o' supper."

"How did she seem—was she cheerful?"

"She was as she always was," Hamilton said glumly. He didn't want to think about the way she had looked, or her joking kindness—the ripple of her laughter still echoed dimly in his ears. He'd been a fool to soften to her as he had. Life had taught him that if you liked a person, sooner or later he hurt you. "If ye're lookin' for saething to do, ye might find oot who was busyin' theirsels wi' my engines last nicht."

"What do you mean?" McCleary was startled out of his sulkiness.

"Juist that. Some one was in the factory, monkeyin'

about ma engines. 'Tis a miracle all the lights dinna gae oot."

McCleary's small eyes sparkled. "They did. So Miss Chambers said. Mrs. Harvy, though, claimed that the ones in her place were on all the time. Can you account for that?"

"If th' switch was pulled, the lights a' over went out. The only way the lights wad go oot in one house and not in a' is if a wire gaes doon, or a house fuse is blown."

"How do you know that some one was in the factory?"

Hamilton snorted, "I ken those engines like a mither does her chield. There was mud twa, on th' floor, and marks on the machinery."

Ismael nodded. "I saw them, Tuan. I was going to ask you whether you had made them."

"Not I. 'Twas some clumsy lout blundering about, touching this and that till he found the switch."

"Ought to get some finger prints then, eh, Ismael? The first we've been able to isolate!"

"Nae ye doon't," Hamilton said. "I wiped them off—d'ye think I'd leave ma engine room messed about?"

"When did you wipe them off? Why did you touch them?" McCleary raised his voice in disappointment.

"When I started ma engines this morning," the Scotchman replied, "I picked up a rag and gave a bit of a polish—ma engines are as clean, I'll hae ye know, as a hound's tooth."

"You'd no business to touch anything," McCleary exclaimed. "That was the one chance we had of getting finger prints, and you, you old busybody, spoil it!"

"And why not? It's ma business to mind my engines. I'll not be leaving them dirty for any one—not, mind ye, that I mightn't hae done for an hour or twa if it wad hae helped you catch the mon ye're luikin' for—but I dinna ken thot then, ye'll understand."

The Scotchman was more upset than he was willing to admit, Ismael thought—his Scotch was intermixed with perfectly good English, but which came the more naturally it was difficult to decide.

"Well," grunted McCleary, "it looks to me as though you'd done your damndest to help the murderer. How do we know you were really drunk last night? You might have poured the contents of those two bottles down the drain pipe!"

Hamilton chuckled. "Y' dinna ken the Scots, ma lad. And if you think I wad hae lifted my hand tae touch a hair o' Mrs. Bosworth's heid, or John Harvy's either, ye're a bigger fool than I thocht—and that's sayin' o'er mooch."

McCleary's red face turned an apoplectic purple, and Ismael said hastily, "Tell us what you did this morning, Tuan Hamilton."

"I woke when the tong-tong sounded like I told you. I went to my engines and saw some one had been there, so I wiped off the marks and started them up. Then I

came back to get a bathe; my head was twa big for its skull. A policeman came in and spoke to me, and I told him to wait outside. With my head achin' like it did, I couldna be troubled wi' him juist then. I thought there'd been a fight at the wayong last e'en, and a head or twa bashed, so I ganged along to the hoose to get some aspirin and a change o' clothes. Pearson saw me and told me what had happened afore the policeman there could stop him. A guid laddie is Pearson. Then I came along here under police escort, and here I've been ever since. Now ye ken as much as I do, and I'll be gangin' back to ma wurrk afore the latex is a' ruined." He rose with deliberation and stood waiting for McCleary to speak.

"One moment, Tuan, if you please," Ismael said. "Do you know anything about a memorandum that Tuan Harvy gave Tuan Bosworth yesterday. It was on blue paper, and I understand that blue is used only for notes about rubber production."

Hamilton rubbed his grey stubbled chin. "Likely 'twould be saething aboot ma report. I gae John my figures for the month's production the nicht before, and he was sore worrit. I dinna ken for sure, but likely 'twas aboot that, for I mind his sayin' he must hae a serious talk wi' Bosworth."

"Have you a copy of the report you gave him?" Ismael asked.

"O' course, mon. I keep one copy for ma files, and the original and a second copy I always gie to John. Richtly

it should gae to Bosworth, but John's the one who does a' the wurrk. He'd send ma figures, along wi' his ane report to London, and he'd file away the second carbon for himsel'."

Ismael looked thoughtful. "Did you see carbons of production figures when you went through Tuan Harvy's papers?" he asked McCleary. "According to Tuan Hamilton, there should be a whole file of them, perhaps many files."

"I didn't notice anything of the sort, but I wasn't looking for that kind of thing," the officer, who was bored with the apparent irrelevance of the conversation replied indifferently. "What did he keep them in?"

"In a blue folder in the bottom drawer of his desk—in the office back of the living room," Hamilton declared. "He took out the folder whilst I was there, and looked up last month's record."

McCleary shook his head. "I saw a lot of colored folders in that drawer—all business stuff, but there wasn't a blue one among them. What's the use of wasting time over that, anyway? Let's get on with our questioning. All we have to do is to find some one who saw Bosworth or Mrs. Harvy near the place where Harvy was killed, and we'll pin the murder right on them. Some one must have seen them; the servants or the coolies. As for Bosworth's talk about a blue memorandum, I think it's all hokum he made up to account for his time while he was murdering Harvy. Who'd bother stealing a couple of sheets of paper!"

"That, Tuan, is what I wish to know," Ismael said rising. "I think while you are questioning the rest of the people, I will go with Tuan Hamilton and see what there was of interest in his report."

"All right, go on if you want to, but there's nothing to it," McCleary growled. "Perhaps by the time you get through chasing mare's nests, Farnsworth's fever will have dropped and we can find out what he was up to last night. He may be able to identify the murderer."

Ismael was silent on the swift walk down to the factory, but Hamilton marvelled at the speed with which the Malay's short muscular legs travelled along the muddy road. The rain had stopped temporarily, and a line of coolies with zinc pails of latex was waiting outside the factory, while just inside the door, the half-caste clerk, Josephs, cursed and muttered as he weighed the contents of each pail and jotted down the figures. The air was acrid with the smell of rubber and acid in the great vats along the side of the room, and the damp, perspiring bodies of the natives.

Josephs gave a sigh of relief as Hamilton pushed past the coolies and entered the building. "You'll have to carry on for a bit longer, Josephs," the Scotchman said, and then in an irritable voice he addressed Ismael. "See how ye're holdin' up the wurrk wi' ye'r foolishness. Pearson or Mason should be down here doin't the weighin'. 'Twas Farnsworth's day for it. I'll gie you the folder o' reports, and you can tak it along wi' ye, and tell Mc-

Cleary he's got to let one o' the assistants free—even Bosworth wad be better than nae one."

Matter-of-factly the engineer went to the filing cabinet and yanked open a drawer. His big, gnarled hand paused in midair, and his expression was suddenly blank as he stared at the neat array of folders. Quickly he began to toss them out onto the table until the drawer was empty. "It's not here," he muttered, and jerked open the other two drawers. "This year's file is gone—naething sen December o' last year." He turned to his desk and began to search frantically among the papers under its rolled top, and then angrily dumped the contents of the desk drawers onto the floor.

"It's not here. Not any place." He raised a flushed face from the litter he had been pawing through, and scratched his grey, prickly chin. "Feckless, that's what it is. Feckless! Who wad want my reports?"

"Perhaps some one is afraid of losing his job when the Tuan Besars in London should see the report," Ismael suggested.

"Nae, that is nonsense. The report went to London yesterday."

"Are you sure it went, Tuan?"

"Josephs!" bawled Hamilton, "did you mail the report for Mr. Harvy yesterday or did you not?"

The dapper, half-caste clerk came to the door. "Yes, Tuan. I took it in to Kluang as always and registered it at the post office."

"Tell me just what you did," Ismael said. "When did Tuan Harvy give it to you? Was it sealed? Did any one touch it besides yourself?"

"Mr. Harvy sent for me to come to his office," the clerk said precisely. "He was sealing the envelope with red wax. He gave it into my hands and told me to go right in to Kluang and register it. I did, and when I returned, I gave him the receipt. No one touched the letter save myself and Mr. Harvy."

"All richt, gae back to ye'r weighin'," Hamilton ordered, ignoring the curiosity in the half-caste's yellowish face.

"You see, Sergeant, it doesna mak sense. The report went to London all richt, and for why wad any one steal the carbons and let the original gang?" the engineer asked belligerently.

"Perhaps the person who stole the carbons was anxious only to suppress the facts here on the estate, and didn't care what your Tuan Besars thought."

The Scotchman looked thoughtful. "Onless, it wad be a question o' time, that sething wad happen, or wad not happen, afore the mail reached London."

"That might be so," Ismael frowned. "The question is whether that could have anything to do with the murders."

Hamilton was dubious. "Mayhap it micht account o' John's death, but Mrs. Bosworth could hae ken't naething about it."

"She never asked you about the amount of rubber produced, or showed any interest in that side of the business?"

"Nay, never. I wad nae hae told her—such things were not her business. Nae more wad John. But she dinna care about that part. She was interested in the coolies and their families, and learned what the markings meant on the trees—the good producers and the bad ones, and the diseases. She liked live things—a great one she was for bein't out o'doors."

"Could she have understood the reports if she had seen them?" Ismael persisted.

"Nae, I doot it. They're quite technical, and abbreviated, and she had nae ower mooch schoolin', so she told me one time. Always pesterin' her mither to let her be an actress, and when her feyther died, her mither said she micht as well get it oot o' her system, for she'd be guid for naethin' else till she tried the stage."

No, it didn't make sense, Ismael silently agreed with the Scotchman: stolen carbons of the monthly reports, a delirious young assistant, a drunken engineer, a missing weapon—a dead woman in a dark house, a dead man on the edge of the black steamy jungle, and the unrecognized figure of the murderer striking through the darkness and the mist.

CHAPTER XII

The house, perched above the wet tossing sea of rubber trees, seemed to be cut off from the rest of the world by the grey monotony of the rain; drizzle that changed to spasmodic, angry shakes of rain, clogged the wire screens, sprayed the sticky rattan furniture, rustled the atap roof, and dripped drearily from the eaves. Yet, despite the damp discomfort of the veranda, none of the people gathered at the main bungalow had any desire to remain indoors. They had hurried through a listless luncheon in a dining room which, although stripped of its festive candles and drooping flowers, was still pregnant with memories of Lydia. At least the air outside was fresh, heavy with the perfume of rain-drenched flowers, the familiar smell of wet leaves, moist earth. Behind its closed doors, its shuttered windows, the house seemed to brood darkly over the tragedy that had taken place within its walls. No amount of electric light could banish the shadows that lived there; they merely slipped to the outskirts of the bright pools made by the shaded lamps, and clustered in corners as though biding their time. Floors creaked suddenly, walls groaned, window curtains and draperies stirred, and the air was weighted with the bitter taste of mildew and decay.

Nancy shivered. "Was it always like this?" she murmured, shifting her gaze from the blank shuttered face of the house.

"Like what?" Jim Mason asked, roused from his reverie by the sound of Nancy's voice. No one had spoken for several minutes.

"The house," she said, flushing at the realization that she had spoken aloud. "It seems to be watching us from behind the shutters; waiting, listening—I can't explain, only it's horrible. I was just wondering whether it missed Lydia, and hated us all because we are alive, and she is gone; or whether it had hated her, too, and was glad she'd been killed."

Mike Sullivan looked at her with interest, but Jim Mason merely blinked. "I don't know what you're driving at. I guess it's just the damnable rain that's making you imagine things. Enough to get on any one's nerves, the eternal drip, drop."

Mike's smile was sarcastic. "Trouble is, Helene, you haven't been in the tropics long enough to blame the weather for everything that happens."

"It's not the rain, though," Nancy insisted. "Why, home I used to love a rainy day. It gave me a chance to get caught up on my mending, or to read— It's cozy indoors in front of a log fire, and it's nice out too, sloshing through puddles with the rain on your face, and the wet sidewalks reflecting the street lamps." Her voice had a homesick note.

Clive Bosworth nodded. "I know what you mean; roaring fires and a tea tray heaped with crumpets and cakes after a day's shooting. Jolly people milling around trying to dry themselves—laughin' and talkin'." He sighed. "Lydia always loved the rain. Wanted to get right out in it. Used to put on old clothes and work in the garden. She'd look a sight when she came in. I got a snapshot of her that way once—sun came out just in time." He smiled wistfully at Nancy. "Would you like to see our albums; some of the pictures date back to Lydia's baby days—might be some of you in it."

Nancy caught her breath at the suddenness of the danger, but her voice was steady as she replied, "Some time, but not now. I don't think I could bear to look at them today." She turned quickly to Jim Mason. "But why were you expelled from college?" she asked with assumed interest. "You had just started to tell me when lunch was announced."

Jim Mason smiled retrospectively. "Oh, a gang of us got in a scrape, and I just happened to be the goat. I decided college was a waste of time for me anyway. I wanted to get out and do things."

Mike Sullivan rose and stretched his long arms. "I wish to God I knew what McCleary and Ismael are up to," he said. "How long are they going to keep us penned up here? They've spent hours questioning us, going over every move we've made since yesterday morning, and still they keep us hanging around." The stolid little

Malay policeman stationed by the veranda door watched his restless movements with round wary eyes.

Bill Pearson rubbed a nervous hand across his forehead. "Ismael is questioning the servants, I believe, and McCleary is down in the coolie lines. I suppose they are trying to find out whether any of us were seen over there—" he stared with haunted eyes in the direction of the spot where John Harvy's body had been found. His handsome face was haggard, and he seemed to have aged ten years since the previous night. He had scarcely spoken all morning, just stared into space with a tortured expression, and at lunch had barely touched his food.

Clive Bosworth, on the other hand, seemed more normal and self-possessed than he had at any time, in spite of the fact that McCleary obviously suspected him of the murders. Mike Sullivan was far more upset about the situation than Clive was—the big Irishman's muscles had tensed each time McCleary had gone near his friend.

"There goes Ismael now," Jim Mason said, peering through the rain-silvered screen. "The kabun is with him, and they're going down toward the garden." Every one leaned forward to watch the two figures moving quickly across the glistening lawn to pause at one of the flower beds. The kabun was pointing, and Ismael was down on his knees in the mud examining some plants. Presently the kabun hurried away, to return in a few minutes with a green wicker basket in one hand, and some gardening

tools in the other. "That's the basket Lydia had yesterday!" Bill Pearson exclaimed with a show of interest. "He must be trying to check up on whether she got any plants."

"What's that got to do with the murders?" Jim Mason asked impatiently. "Fine detectives they are—fussing about plants and blue papers and missing folders! Why don't they do something to catch the murderer! I'm fed up with their puttering around, and their eternal questions about this and that, till you don't know what you're saying. Why don't they get on with something useful?"

A car crunched along the gravel driveway and stopped at the steps. Betty Harvy, frail and pathetic, looked up at the veranda. Clive sprang from his chair beside the door, and went down the steps to meet her. "I couldn't bear to stay over there all by myself," she murmured, tears dazzling her lovely eyes, "so I made the policeman bring me here. You don't mind, do you?"

"Of course not," Clive said, helping her up the slippery steps. "I didn't think you'd feel up to coming out, or seeing people, or we'd have suggested your coming over."

Betty smiled wanly at the men who had risen, and then sank gracefully into a chair. "You've no idea how ghastly it is over there—all the servants slinking around and peeking at me from corners, and the policeman watching every move I make. You don't suppose Mr. McCleary will mind my coming over, do you?" She

looked up anxiously into Clive's face as he bent to light her cigarette.

"He'll probably be glad," Bosworth said grimly, and then over his shoulder, "get her a shot of brandy, will you, Mike—she's shivering."

With a muffled sound that was almost a snort, the Irishman slammed into the house, and the door groaned shut behind him.

Nancy jumped to her feet—now was the time to find out what had happened to her shoes. Somehow, she hadn't had the courage to go into the house alone, even though she knew there were servants inside, and a policeman on duty outside the room where Farnsworth lay. She'd ask Mike Sullivan to inquire whether the servants had taken her shoes, or where they were—she could say the sandals she had on were uncomfortable.

Nancy paused for a moment beside Betty's chair—she ought to say something to her—after all, the woman had lost her husband under horrible circumstances. "I'm so terribly sorry, Mrs. Harvy," she murmured. "Is there anything I can do for you? Anything I can get you? A sweater, or a wrap perhaps?—it's damp out here."

Betty held out a fragile, carefully manicured hand. "Thank you, dear." Her voice was dulcet, but it seemed to Nancy that the blue eyes were hard, suspicious, in the brief second before her long lashes drooped over them, "There's nothing I want now—later I may impose on you, if Clive is willing. I don't think I can face a night

alone over there—" She hesitated and glanced appealingly at Clive.

"Why, er—of course, Betty," the Englishman said, "we can fix up some place for you. Perhaps Miss Chambers won't mind your bunkin' in with her?" He looked rather helplessly at Nancy. So, that was her game was it, Nancy thought grimly, but there was nothing for her to do but to acquiesce as graciously as she could, repulsive as the prospect was.

Nancy opened the door, and at the sound of the groaning hinges, Mike Sullivan came out of the dining room. He looked startled at the sight of her standing there in the greyish light of the hall, and in some indefinable way she had the impression that he was glad to see her. "I wonder whether you will ask the servants what happened to my shoes," she said. "The ones I wore yesterday disappeared, and these are too new yet to be comfortable."

He nodded. "Boy!" His voice echoed hollowly under the high ceilings, and the sturdy little Malay policeman, who had been eyeing them suspiciously from his post beside Clive's bedroom door, started at the sound. Semut opened the door at the rear of the hall, hastily buttoning a fresh white coat, "Apa, Tuan?"

Mike addressed him in rapid Malay, glancing down at Nancy's slim white sandals. Semut popped back through the door like a wooden jack-in-the-box, to appear smiling a moment later with Nancy's brogues—a damp grey—in his hands. Behind him came another houseboy hold-

ing a can of blanco and a sponge. His brown face was worried, his splutter of words and his gestures apologetic.

"He is just cleaning them now," Mike explained. "All the work had been held up by the police and he hasn't had time to finish yet. Anyway, it is too damp for the shoes to dry today, so there was no hurry."

"Give them to me, please." Nancy stretched out her hand toward Semut, who moved unwillingly to hand her the shoes. Swiftly her slim fingers explored the toes. The stuffing was gone! What had happened to the letters and telegrams? Her worried eyes met Mike's curious gaze, and she flushed. "I had some tissue paper stuffed inside to keep them in shape. It's gone now. Will you ask what they did with it? Who took the shoes out of my room, anyway?" she asked irritably. "I always clean my own white shoes. No one ought to have touched them."

"I'll tell the boy to find some shoe trees. Nothing to get the wind up about, is there?" he asked lazily.

Nancy bit her lip. "No, of course not. Only I don't like people touching my things, and I don't want shoe trees; they leave ridges in the suède when it's damp."

Once more Mike addressed the boys and listened to their singsong replies. "The houseboy said he found the shoes on the back veranda this morning, with Clive's and mine. There was nothing inside them, but if you want them stuffed with paper, he will find some. He's probably lying—threw your tissue paper away—it must have been wet. But, that's as near the truth as you'll get. Better give

the shoes back to him. You can't wear them until they've dried." He seemed suddenly bored with the discussion, annoyed at the stubborn set of her chin. Why did women fuss over such trifles? He had thought she was different. Two murders committed on the estate—the killer still prowling around, the place overrun with policemen; and this girl thinking of nothing except a foolish little pair of wet shoes. He shrugged his broad shoulders and turned toward the dining room. "I have to get some brandy for Mrs. Harvy, or Clive will be on my neck."

Reluctantly Nancy handed the shoes to Semut. It was as much a mystery as ever; she still didn't know who had taken them out of her room, or what had happened to the papers. All she could do was to hope that the house-boy actually had destroyed them. And, far from making any headway in finding out which man knew that she wasn't Helene Chambers, she had annoyed Jim Mason by leaving him so abruptly, and had disgusted Mike Sullivan by her fussiness over her shoes. The outlook wasn't very encouraging, but she felt she ought to try at least to penetrate his guard, and she knew that she could do that only by antagonizing him; he would have no patience with attempted coquetry.

"You are worse than a mother hen with a duckling," she accused, following him into the dim greyness of the shuttered dining room.

Mike turned to glare at her. "What do you mean by that?"

"Just that you are always worrying about Mr. Bosworth. Any one would think he was three years old, instead of thirty, and with a subnormal I.Q. at that. It's ridiculous, you know—makes you both look so absurd."

His green eyes flashed at her insolence, but his angry rejoinder faltered at the realization that there was some truth in her accusation. Good Lord! what were people thinking? Did that snip of girl believe—? Suddenly, he pushed the electric light button, and a cold, harsh light flooded the room, rushing the shadows back into the hall. Mike stared down at Nancy. No, her small, upturned face was impudent, but there was no insinuation in her wide hazel eyes. Still, he felt sensitively, there was no knowing how other people might be regarding his friendship for Clive.

Why was he looking so queer? Nancy wondered. Why did he take out his handkerchief and mop his forehead as though the room was hot instead of chilly? And above all, why didn't he snap back at her, instead of holding the echo of her last words in this strange, uncomfortable silence?

When at last he did speak, his voice sounded queer and choked. "I can't explain—but long ago I swore that I'd look out for Clive. It was a penance. I can't turn back on it."

"Well," said Nancy matter-of-factly, "you may have promised long ago to look out for him, but that doesn't mean that you have to draw every breath for him. You

are being false to the spirit of your promise, in my opinion, if you don't make him stand on his own feet. You kill his initiative. Whoever asked you to take care of him must have meant that you were to help him be a man, not keep him a perpetual child."

"'Twas a child asked it," Mike said softly—his voice a breath from the past. An old familiar horror dilated his pupils, whitened his face.

"Don't! Don't look like that!" Nancy, conscience-stricken at the effect of her careless words, was shaking his arm. "Whatever it is, it's over—done with." Oh, she thought wildly, she'd never try to pry beneath surfaces again.

He brushed a hand over his face as though he were wiping away his memories. "Sure, I didn't mean to frighten the wits out of you like that. Some ghosts stirred, that is all, but maybe 'twas their last walk, so we'll not begrudge them." His hand shook a little as he lifted a decanter from the side table and poured out a stiff drink. "Have one?" he asked and, as Nancy shook her head, swallowed the brandy in one gulp.

The front door creaked open and shut, a damp current of air swept through the house; and then Jim Mason stood in the wide doorway, a tight, strained expression on his freckled face. "What's taking you two so long?" he demanded in a harsh voice. "I thought something must have happened to Helene."

Nancy flushed at his proprietary tone, and to her an-

noyance found herself feebly maundering excuses about her wet shoes. Jim's look was so frankly skeptical that her voice changed. "I don't have to account for everything I do. You have no right to question me."

"No, of course not. I didn't mean anything—only I was worried because you'd been gone so long," he said humbly, but his narrowed eyes travelled past her to Mike, who was loading a small tray with decanters and glasses. Not until everything was arranged to his satisfaction did the Irishman turn and glance at Jim with a mocking smile. Mason stiffened, but neither man spoke as Mike, with a leisurely smile, moved past them.

Jim glowered at the broad back receding into the shadowy light of the hall. "I can't stand that guy. There's something phony about him."

"What do you mean?" Nancy asked sharply.

"Well, look at the way he acted last night, for instance—all over the place, questioning everybody, reconstructing the crime and what not, and then, when the police came, he had nothing helpful to say at all. If he is so anxious to find the murderer, why doesn't he spout all his smart ideas to McCleary or Ismael? But, no siree, he's afraid now that they'll pin the murder on his friend Clive, and he's in for it too, if Bosworth is guilty, for Clive hasn't the initiative to do anything on his own."

There was some truth in Jim's criticism, Nancy had to admit. Mike's attitude had definitely changed since the previous evening, but it was Mr. Bosworth he was pro-

tecting, she felt sure, not himself. Somehow, since she had had that strange, intimate insight into Mike's suffering, she felt as though, in spite of all the mystery about him, she knew him better than she did the man beside her. After all, she assured herself patriotically, Mike was half American, and Jim was a bit boring—the way he was continually waving the star-spangled banner about—real Americans didn't have to do that. It wasn't so much in what he said, it was his implication that because they were both born in the United States, every one else was naturally suspect. With a start, she realized that Bill Pearson, the reserved, and Bob Farnsworth, the loquacious, were Americans too, as Lydia had been. Jim was staring at her with troubled eyes. "What's the matter with you, anyway? You haven't fallen for him, have you?" he asked in dismay.

"Good heavens, no!" Nancy exclaimed with transparent sincerity. "I never even thought of such a thing. And as for him, I'm sure he must loathe me. But, I do think, we ought to forget the fact that we are Americans, or Englishmen or Irishmen, or Scotchmen—after all, what we all want is to find the murderer, whatever nationality he is."

Relieved at her spontaneous denial, and ingenuous outburst of internationalism, Jim grinned. "Well, you had me worried. First I was scared pink that something had happened to you when you were gone so long, and then when I dashed in and saw you standing safe and sound

beside Sullivan, I had the crazy idea that you trusted him; had fallen for him. After all, he's the sort of guy women do fall for, Helene, and he's so damn cold-blooded, he doesn't give a hoot in hell for them. I know his sort. I know it's none of my business, but you're a nice kid, and you come from back home, and I just don't want to see you hurt." His hand was warm and comforting on her chilly arm. "Oh," he exclaimed solicitously, "you're cold—wait, I'll get you something to put on over that silly white dress. The weather here is very deceptive, especially when it rains."

She realized then that she really was chilled through, but while she was still protesting that she would get a wrap of some sort herself, he hurried out into the gloom of the hall, and she heard the quick beat of his heavy footsteps along the bare wooden boards. In a few minutes he was back, carrying a yellow-woolly sweater in a dangling arm. "Here you are, put it on, and let's get out of here."

A haunting fragrance, reminiscent of Lydia, bringing her back poignantly, with all her charm and vivacity, emanated from the soft, golden folds.

Nancy shrank back shivering. "Take it away—I can't wear that. It's Lydia's!"

Jim stared from Nancy's horrified face to the limp yellow sweater in his hand. "What's the matter with it? She kept things like this in the wardrobe down the hall; they were for any one to wear.

"I don't care," Nancy's chin was set stubbornly. "I'd rather freeze to death than have it touch me. Can't you understand that things are different now? Lydia's dead!" She was impatient of his masculine denseness; the bewildered way in which he was turning the sweater in his hand as though seeking an explanation of her repudiation. Probably he had gone dozens of times to fetch that same garment, or similar ones from the wardrobe, at Lydia's behest, and he simply couldn't grasp, with his male indifference to feminine reactions, that at this particular time, the sweater was abhorrent. Men were just plain dumb, but you couldn't explain anything so fundamental. Either they got it, or they didn't. Jim definitely didn't.

"Never mind," Nancy said with a wavering smile. "I'll get something of my own."

The sweater slipped through his fingers, a golden heap on the dark wood seat of the chair beside the dining room door. "Well, of all the silly nonsense!" he ejaculated! but without waiting for him to complete his indictment, Nancy hurried along the hall. The rain, in one of its sudden tempers, beat for admission on the resistant roof; the hall seemed longer and colder than ever, and over her shoulder she saw Jim, with hunched disgruntled shoulders, at the veranda door. So, he wasn't going to wait for her! Nancy shivered again, and then, seeing the policeman beside the opposite door, felt reassured, even though his almond-brown eyes gleamed with suspicion as she passed him.

The idea of expecting me to wear Lydia's sweater! She flagged her indignation to distract herself from the chill hostility of her room. Rain was drumming on the window sills, falling in thin grey strings beyond the half closed slats of the shutters; a damp breeze fluttered the soggy curtains. Hurriedly, she rushed to the wardrobe and flung open the door. Her garments drooped dejectedly from the hangers; dresses above, shoes and slippers on the wardrobe floor beneath them, like headless, legless ghosts swaying from their scaffolds. They stirred in protest as a wet breeze sighed through the room, and the wardrobe door creaked on its rusty hinges.

"Where did I put my sweater!" Nancy murmured, hoping that the sound of her own voice would steady her nerves. Her hands shook as she groped through the clinging, swaying folds of silk and linen, feeling for something soft and woolly. She should have turned on the light—it was as dark as pitch in the wardrobe, and the musty odor of mildew was almost overpowering. "Darn the sweater!" she exclaimed. "I'll take my white flannel coat." It was the last garment in the closet, and as she touched the familiar sleeve, she stiffened. What was that sound! A board creaked as though some one was creeping up behind her. There was some one behind her. Her dresses were suddenly enemies seizing her, catching in her hair as she tried to escape, and one of them slid from the hanger, a maddening, silken noose over her shoulders, until she shook it off.

She heard the wardrobe door creak again, a rusty warning, and she felt a hot breath on her bare neck, as a sinewy hand seized her throat, choking back her scream. Something suffocating was thrown over her head, twisted tight across her mouth. It was soft and woolly and held Lydia's faint fragrance—her sweater that Nancy had repudiated. Frantically she tried to struggle, expecting every second to feel a dagger plunge into her helpless body. A rough hand shoved her face forward into the wardrobe, and she fell into a heap of dresses that had slipped from their hangers. The wardrobe door groaned shut. Paralyzed with fear, she lay motionless where she had fallen, expecting every moment that the door would be flung open again and that the murderer would seize her.

"This is just a warning, Nancy Reynolds," a hoarse voice, elusively familiar, whispered, "in case you are tempted to tell any one what you know——"

CHAPTER XIII

Ismael watched the last saronged, white-coated servant slip through the open door of the underground office, and disappear into the rainy gloom of the late afternoon. For hours he had been sitting there behind Clive's flat-topped desk patiently, tactfully, questioning the servants of the various households on the estate; house boys, gardeners, chauffeurs, cooks, babus—coaxing replies from blank brown faces, pouncing swiftly on each glimmer of fear in the wary, almond-shaped eyes; cajoling them, reassuring them.

He had received some information for his pains, though he had nothing tangible to offer to McCleary. The white officer dealt only with facts, and would be satisfied with nothing less than the complete identification of the murderer, or, perhaps direct evidence that one or both of his pet suspects had been witnessed on the scene of the crime.

Ismael's broad brown face relaxed into a smile as he glanced down at his notes, and visualized his white superior's disgust.

Saidi, Lydia's maid, had been the first to contribute to the pictures Ismael was slowly forming of the chief actors in the tragedies. She had never seen her mistress weep,

though when she first came back from her journey she had looked worried and a little sad. Saidi didn't know whether her mistress had known of the Tuan's intrigue with Mem Harvy or not—certainly she had never spoken of it in Saidi's hearing. No, her Mem she was sure didn't like Tuan Sullivan, but that was because he took the Tuan Besar away so much. The servants all liked him; he was kind to them, and generous. Better, wasn't it, that he took the Tuan away hunting than leave him to the wiles of Mem Harvy? Mem Bosworth was too good to think evil of any one. Saidi knew of nothing unusual that happened the day before, except, of course, the wayong. Her mistress had been cheerful. It was not strange for her to go to the jungle for flowers or ferns for her garden. She had found some new plants on her walk yesterday, and had planted them with her own hands—she had growing hands, things lived for her that would die with even the kabun. No, she was just as usual when she returned from her walk, only when the Tuan Besar and Tuan Sullivan didn't come home for dinner she was annoyed a little, but even then she laughed—the Mem was always laughing. No, never, never, never, was Mem Bosworth interested in any man except the Tuan. She was not like Mem Harvy, unfaithful by nature. Saidi knew of no one who would wish to harm her mistress, unless perhaps it was Mem Harvy, that was truly a snake in the grass, but Saidi admitted reluctantly, that she was too mouse-spirited to kill any one. As for the Tuan Besar doing so terrible a

thing—Saidi threw up her arms in repudiation of the idea—the Tuan was a child really, but he loved Mem, he needed her.

The Harvy servants, under pressure, confirmed the story of the affair between their mistress and Clive Bosworth, adding dates and details, and wondering mildly that Tuan Harvy and Mem Bosworth should have been so blind. Their Tuan was too trusting, their Mem too sly. But their Tuan worked too hard; he thought always of the estate, and he left the Mem alone too much. No, Tuan Bosworth was not the first lover she had taken, but she seemed to like him best; at least, she had stopped seeing Tuan Farnsworth, and Tuan Farnsworth was handsome and fresh and young, and crazy with love for her. He hadn't been her lover, but he wanted to be. Every one liked Tuan Harvy; he was kind and just. No, he had never quarrelled with any of the white men—the assistants he treated like his younger brothers, helping them always, so long as they did their work. Yes, they all worked well, except, of course, Tuan Bosworth; but he was the Tuan Besar, so even their master could do nothing about that.

Hamilton's boy was as stubbornly loyal as his master, but eventually he admitted, with caution, that sometimes, not often, his Tuan drank too much. Then he might get into a rage, swear and throw things about, but in the morning he had forgotten all about it. He was a good man when he didn't drink, and even when he did have

too much, he was still far and away the best man on the estate.

From Bill Pearson's boy, Ismael elicited the fact that the engineer was difficult to handle when he was drunk. Once when Tuan Pearson tried to stop him, he had thrown a chair at him, and broken a mirror. The next day he remembered nothing, but he was very sorry, for he liked Tuan Pearson, and he had bought a new mirror for him. Tuan Pearson was a good man to work for—always even tempered and considerate. Even when he was in trouble, he didn't get angry at the servants. No, he didn't know what the trouble was, only that it had come in the mail about a month ago. Tuan Pearson had shut himself in his room for a long time, and when he came out, he seemed sad. He tried to hide it when he was with other people, but since that letter had come, he had slept badly, sometimes his light had burned all through the night, and his bed would not show a wrinkle. On those nights he would smoke two cans of cigarettes, a hundred, but even so, he was never short tempered. He had been like that when he first came to the estate—walk, walk, walk—all night, and smoke, smoke, smoke. Then he was better; for a long time, he was like other men; but after the letter came he had heard his Tuan saying a name over and over, "Sheilah!" and he had been surprised to hear a woman's name, because his Tuan didn't seem to like women. Strange, was it not? when Tuan Pearson was so virile, so handsome!

There was something about Mahat, Jim Mason's boy, that Ismael disliked. He was too smooth, too self-possessed, too voluble. It was often true of boys who worked for Americans; they didn't seem to know how to handle natives—either they were too hard on them, or too easy. Mahat was full of glib praise for Jim, but when he mentioned Tuan Farnsworth, his tone was disrespectful: Tuan Farnsworth was a child who didn't know his way around the world. He wanted to be a man, but when he played cards, he always lost; when he tried to drink, a little whisky made him foolish. Mahat's broad mouth stretched into a leer—why, he couldn't even get a woman when he wanted one! Mem Harvy had made a monkey out of him, when every one knew how easy she was. Then there was the Malay girl who used to do the washing for Tuan Mason and Tuan Farnsworth—a bold piece who had made up to Tuan Farnsworth, and he, like a fool, had fallen for her blandishments. Almost, she had talked him into taking her to be his mistress; and then some one had told Mem Bosworth, and she had called him to the house and scolded him until he came back cringing like a dog, with his tail between his legs. Tuan Farnsworth had no faith in himself; he wanted every one to like him, and if people paid him attention he would be happy, saying they were “swell,” and if they snubbed him, he'd call them all louses and sonsofbitches, and say they'd be sorry some day.

Farnsworth's boy was more reticent than Mason's, but

it was obvious that he had no respect or affection for the man he served, and rather resented the fact that his master had caused him to lose face.

Ismael was so busy fitting together the bits of information he had garnered that he started when McCleary paused on the threshold. Water dripped from the officer's rain-soaked sun helmet, making rivulets on the dusty floor, and his khaki uniform was black with rain. "How about a little light?" he asked, switching on a high white glare. "I hope you had better luck than I did. I saw more Chinese than a Jap's nightmare, and enough Malays and Indians to overthrow the British Government—and not a damn one of them apparently was within a quarter of a mile of the place where Harvy was killed—at the approximate time he was killed, that is. Model coolies, according to their stories; they heard no evil, saw no evil, and certainly, they spoke no evil."

He threw his wet topee down on the desk, and rubbed the dark red crease it had pressed into his forehead. "How did you make out?"

"I have some notes here, Tuan, that may interest you," Ismael said, pushing his close, meticulously written pages across the desk, "but I got no direct evidence against any one. I am sure the servants are concealing nothing of importance."

McCleary blinked down at the delicate handwriting. "I'm too tired to wade through all that now. Just give me any high lights, will you?"

"Do not expect too much, Tuan," Ismael said disparagingly. "The things I learned are but parts of an unknown whole." Briefly he summarized the information he had obtained from the various servants. As he finished, McCleary sighed and shifted his position. "And what does that add up to?" he asked in a discouraged tone. "Nothing! I tell you, Ismael, Bosworth's our man, with the Harvy woman accessory before and after the fact." The officer perched himself on the edge of the desk, swinging a soggy, rain-soaked shoe. "I've gone over this affair until I'm giddy, and every time I run up against the only solid facts we have: Bosworth and Mrs. Harvy are the only ones who had a motive to kill Mrs. Bosworth and John. And, in addition to the two strong motives—lust and greed," his lips curled with distaste, "they had the opportunity. Neither of them has alibis for the time of either murder."

Ismael's smooth brown face looked unconvinced. "No one had an alibi for the time of Mrs. Bosworth's murder, and only the American girl has one for this morning when Tuan Harvy was killed. You know how carefully we have questioned every one today, and checked their statements not only with each other, but with the servants and the police who were on guard. The answer is the same in the case of Pearson, Mason, Sullivan and Bosworth. The men arose at their usual time, had breakfast, and went out into a morning thick with mist and drizzle. More than that we cannot discover, for only the mur-

derer knows whether he ran swiftly through the fog to ambush Tuan Harvy, or walked slowly and directly to the coolie lines."

"But they were all on time except Bosworth, don't forget that!" McCleary said triumphantly. "And don't forget either that for the first time in the memory of man, Mrs. Harvy got up early this morning and walked part way with her husband. If she wasn't doing that to distract his attention from danger, I'll eat my hat."

"You also forget two things, Tuan," Ismael grinned. "Tuan Hamilton admittedly was wandering around this morning—he who flies into a rage when he is drunk, and then remembers nothing about it; and Tuan Farnsworth who evidence shows was at the edge of the jungle path—Tuan Farnsworth whose behavior has been so strange throughout."

McCleary frowned. "I'm not overlooking either of those birds," he protested. "It's been clear to me all along that either these murders are the wanton killings of a crazy man, or they are component parts of a cold-blooded plot. I don't really believe though that Hamilton, drunk or sober, committed the murders; as for Farnsworth, I'll admit he's a bit 'gila,' but that's a long way from being a homicidal maniac. Anyway, we'll know more as soon as we're able to question him. If he did commit the murders, in his weakened state we ought to be able to get it out of him, and if he didn't—well, I'm just hoping he saw the murderer come out of the jungle. Doc said his fever

ought to go down this afternoon. He didn't think there was a question of concussion—just shock and exposure, and a bad bumping. You haven't heard anything from the nurse, I take it? She was to let us know as soon as he was fit to talk."

Even as Ismael shook his smooth black head, a polite knock sounded hollowly on the open door, and they saw the trim figure of a Malay policeman outlined against the darkening grey oblong of light.

"Apa?" McCleary inquired, motioning the constable to enter. "Why did you leave your post?"

"The nurse sent me to tell you that Tuan Farnsworth's head is clear now, and that you may speak to him for a short time."

McCleary slid from his perch on the desk. "Good! Now we'll get somewhere. No need to go out into the rain again, we can go up these stairs."

Ismael leaned across the desk and addressed the constable. "Who is on duty upstairs? Did you leave some one at your post?"

The little policeman shifted his feet uneasily. "No, Tuan. There was no one to leave. The nurse said I must go directly to Tuan McCleary." His heavy face brightened. "There is my brother on the veranda outside, and my cousin is having kopee in the kitchen. Surely no harm can come of my leaving."

"Come on, Ismael." McCleary moved impatiently. "You're as fussy as an old maid schoolteacher." He

yanked open the door and disappeared up the narrow enclosed stairway leading into the bedroom overhead.

Ismael sighed. "All right, go back quickly to your post," he said and, still frowning, followed McCleary's heavy footsteps.

As the door from the stairway opened, the long figure on the bed twitched uneasily, and Farnsworth's blue eyes, dilated with sudden fear, stared at them from beneath a white bandage. A half-caste nurse moved with a rustle of starched uniform to the bedside, and placed a yellow, efficient hand on his wrist. "It is all right—only the police who are guarding you. You have nothing to fear." She turned apologetically to the officers who were blinking in the glare of lights. "There shouldn't be so much light here, but he fears the dark. There must be no shadows anywhere in the room."

McCleary nodded. "That's all right." His glance banished the nurse to the other side of the room, and he took her place beside the sick man. "Feeling better, Farnsworth?"

"My head aches like the very devil," Dave complained, "and my mouth feels like the inside of a last year's bird's nest."

"That's too bad, but the nurse will be able to fix you up in a little while. Suppose you tell us what happened to you last night, and how you got in such a fix."

Farnsworth's eyes shifted from McCleary's red face to

Ismael's brown one. "Who's he?" he demanded. "I haven't seen him before."

"He is Inspector Ismael from Johore, who has come up to help me with this case. It was he who found you this morning. We both want to know why you left this room last night, and where you went." McCleary's voice was patient, coaxing.

"Why wouldn't I leave? Do you think I was going to stay here and be murdered in my bed? Some one tried to shoot me, but I got away from him, out of the window over there. Scratched my arm on the catch as I scrambled out, but I didn't know it until later. I ran and ran—but it was so dark and muddy I couldn't make any time. After awhile I remembered seeing a bicycle down by the factory, so I made for that——"

"Just a moment, Tuan, please," Ismael interrupted. "When did you see the bicycle?"

Farnsworth looked uncomfortable, and then with a forced laugh he said, "I suppose I'd better admit it. It was all just a joke, you know, my switching off the lights."

McCleary started, but before he could speak, Ismael interposed smoothly, "Whom was the joke against, Tuan?"

"Bosworth, of course—Bosworth and Betty. I thought I'd teach them a lesson. I knew he was going up to see her, and so, when he slipped away from the wayong, I followed him outside. She had it coming to her for treating me the way she did. I knew she was alone up there

waiting for him, and I thought I'd throw a scare into her. Hamilton was dead to the world, and the watchman had slipped off to get a squint at the wayong, so it was easy enough. I only left the lights off for about ten minutes; I didn't want really to inconvenience any one, you know. It was while I was waiting to put them on again that I wandered out the back door and stumbled against the bicycle."

So, Ismael thought, Mrs. Harvy was either lying about the lights, or had gone to meet Clive and really knew nothing of the sudden darkness. But, by the same token, since the lights didn't go on again at the Bosworth bungalow, it meant that some one there, Mrs. Bosworth, the American girl, or the murderer, had turned them off. Those facts must somehow fit into the pattern of the crime, but he didn't yet see just how.

"And after you found the bicycle? McCleary prompted him, "where did you go then?"

Farnsworth seemed relieved that the officers had accepted his confession about the lights so matter-of-factly. "I decided I'd go to Kluang and put up at the Rest House there, and in the morning, I'd come back and pack. I knew I'd queered myself here on the estate by shooting off my face about every one, and besides, I wasn't going to stick around and be killed."

"Did you go to Kluang?"

"No, it was too far; it was pitch black too, and raining, and the roads were flooded in places. My head still

ached from where Pearson had socked me, and I was dizzy. I knew there was an old abandoned hut that had belonged to a Chinese kabun, a couple of miles down the road, and I decided to go there and spend the night. Things looked different in the dark though, and I had quite a time locating the place. It's a bit off the highway, but I finally found it. It was pretty lousy though; the roof leaked like a sieve, but it was better than being outdoors. As soon as it began to get light, I started back to the estate to get dry clothes on, and to pack up, but the mist down there was so thick you couldn't see your hands before your face, and after I turned off the highway, I must have wandered off the estate road, for the first thing I knew, I was bang up against a wall of jungle as black as your hat. I knew I was wrong then, and started back. The next thing I remember, I woke up here in this bed." In contrast to the first part of his story, the finish which should have been the climax was very much curtailed, and Farnsworth's attitude too had subtly changed. His eyes no longer looked into McCleary's, and his thin, nervous fingers automatically creased and smoothed the edge of the bedspread.

"Did you see any one, or hear anything when you were near the jungle?" the inspector asked eagerly.

"No, not a soul," Farnsworth said. "How could I see any one in that fog?" His voice was higher, more penetrating, and held a faint note of hysteria. Ismael knew he was lying.

McCleary had apparently accepted the statement at its face value, for he sounded discouraged as he asked, "What about those accusations you made last night?"

Farnsworth winced as he shook his head emphatically. "Lies," he declared. "All lies. I had quite a lot to drink, and it made me ugly—I was sore at everybody and in a mood to make trouble. Rotten of me. I didn't mean a word I said—you tell the other fellows for me, will you? Tell them that I realized what a damned fool I made of myself, and that I'm resigning; that I'm going back to America on the first boat I can get. You fix it all up for me, will you, like a good chap?" His hot hand clutched McCleary's hairy paw. Funk, pure, unadulterated funk; the officer had difficulty in concealing his repulsion.

"That won't wash, you know, Farnsworth. You may have had a drop too much, but you knew what you were saying, and you must have had some grounds for your accusations."

"No, no, I didn't!" in the eagerness of his denial, Farnsworth sat upright. "I don't even remember what I said. That shows you, doesn't it? It was all hooey—all of it—and you be sure to tell everybody."

The nurse moved forward with a severe rustle. "You've upset my patient, Mr. McCleary. He's talked enough. Now he is going to have a bromide and go sleepy bye—" her hand rested soothingly on Farnsworth's forehead, pressing him back onto his pillow and with the fatuous

confidence of a child from whom responsibility had been lifted, he smiled up at her.

For a moment McCleary looked baffled, and then he said, "Just a minute, nurse. I think I can relieve your patient's mind; he has a kind of persecution complex or something." She hesitated, a bit out of her depth, and McCleary addressed Farnsworth again. "You think some one tried to kill you last night, don't you? And you're afraid they may try again if you say anything more. What you thought was a shot, though, wasn't a shot at all, it was just Miss Chambers' door banging against the wall when she flung it open. A man was on guard outside your room the whole time, and no one came near it. The door at the head of those stairs was locked, and the shutters closed until you opened one yourself. What's more, every one was on the veranda except Miss Chambers, and you certainly can't believe that she knocked out your guard, crashed into your room and fired a shot at you. She had no reason to dislike you, and furthermore the guard hadn't been touched."

Farnsworth's eyes opened wide. "You're just trying to make me feel good. I tell you I heard him, I know—" He bit back whatever it was that he started to say. "I don't want to be killed—" his voice rose into a wail.

"Wait, Tuan, calm yourself," Ismael said. "What Tuan McCleary says is quite true, and I will prove it to you. You will believe it, will you not, if you hear the same sound again? And you will not be frightened, because the

nurse will hold your hand, and Tuan McCleary will be here—and also, outside your door there is a policeman on guard.”

Farnsworth slowly digested Ismael’s statement. With all the lights on—with two people he trusted in the room, and with a man outside. Slowly he nodded his head.

“Good,” Ismael encouraged him. “Now I will open this door, cross the hall, and throw back Miss Chambers’ door, as she did last night. You will hear it crash against the wall, and you will tell us whether it is the same sound.”

Swiftly Ismael left the room. The little constable, leaning against the wall outside, drew himself to attention. The hall was almost dark as Ismael crossed it diagonally and paused in front of Nancy’s room. “Turn on the lights in the hall,” he called suddenly to the policeman. Strange how this house affected him, he thought. He couldn’t remember ever before craving physical light as he did here, and more and more, as though the evil that lurked in the house was always just a few steps ahead, in the shadows, and could be banished by the click of a switch.

The shadows leaped away as the electric lights came on, illuminating the harsh whitewashed walls and ceiling, the rough boards of the floor. The hall, as he expected, was empty, save for the table by the front door, and the heavy wardrobe by the back door; the constable moving sedately back to his post, and he himself standing afraid beside the girl’s bedroom. Impatient of his own imagin-

ings, Ismael jerked open the door, and it swung back, as he had expected, with a sharp, reverberating bang. The light from the hall rushed a short way into the bedroom, and settled into a long yellow wedge between the phalanxes of shadows.

Something was lying there huddled on the floor, at the edge of the shadows. With an exclamation of fear, Ismael dropped on his knees beside Nancy's body.

CHAPTER XIV

Leaving a constable on guard outside Nancy's room while she, recovered from her frightening experience, repaired the damage to her appearance, Ismael hurried downstairs to rejoin McCleary. The white officer looked up eagerly as the Malay appeared in the doorway. "What did she say after she recovered consciousness?" he asked. "Did she recognize him? Why did he attack her?"

Ismael smiled noncommittally. "To the first question, she said much, after some persuasion. To the second question, she didn't recognize her attacker, for he grabbed her from behind and pushed her face foremost into the closet; and to the third question, the murderer warned her to keep quiet about her identity, but why he did that, she doesn't know, nor can I understand."

McCleary blinked. "Identity? What about her identity? What's it all about anyway?" His voice was fretful.

Ismael settled himself in a straight-backed chair opposite the inspector. "She is not Miss Chambers; she is another American girl, Nancy Reynolds, who met Mrs. Bosworth four months ago when they were shipmates." He motioned for McCleary to wait, as the officer began to splutter. "I will explain her motive in a few minutes.

Miss Reynolds came to Penang to act as secretary for Doctor Gordon, the great historian on the Far East. He came from the same town in New England, and knew her family. Apparently, for all his wisdom, the famous scholar was as much a child, in worldly ways, as the American girl, for he expected his young English wife to receive her as a friend. The situation, Tuan, was like the motive of a wayong, for in addition to the idealistic professor and the two antagonistic women, there was a young Englishman who, apparently courting Miss Reynolds, was actually the lover of Mrs. Gordon. And Mrs. Gordon, to protect her own interests, let it be known that the new secretary was her husband's mistress. Not a nice situation for the ingenue."

McCleary nodded, and then frowned. "But, didn't Doctor Gordon kill himself recently? I got a report—suicide while temporarily insane from overwork."

"Yes," Ismael said. "He shot himself, but that was after he found his wife in her room with her lover. Miss Reynolds, too, had discovered the intrigue that day, and was packing to go home, when Doctor Gordon returned unexpectedly from Angkor Vat and the dénouement followed. Miss Reynolds was just entering the library when he shot himself. Mrs. Gordon, fearful of what the girl might tell, accused her of murdering her employer, and threatened to tell the police unless she left Penang immediately. Miss Reynolds, frightened and bewildered, believed that she might be arrested, and so she allowed her-

self to be driven away, without her salary, or her return passage, or even a letter of recommendation. The only person she knew in the East was Mrs. Bosworth and so she came here. And, we know what she found upon her arrival."

"But how did she happen to take the name of Helene Chambers? And what has that got to do with the murders and with the attack on her? Did she know any of these people here?" McCleary asked, still hopeful of tangible evidence against some one.

"No, she knew no one. But she found her own telegram to Mrs. Bosworth, and one from Helene Chambers, and so later, when people assumed she was Miss Chambers, she hid the telegrams, and said nothing. It was wrong, of course, Tuan, but it is understandable in view of her experience in Penang. She thought no one would accept her word against that of Mrs. Gordon, that perhaps the police were already looking for her—and now she found herself in a strange house with her murdered hostess."

Ismael waited while the white officer struggled with his conscience, and then smiled as the inspector said slowly, "Well, she shouldn't have lied to us, but I can see why she'd have the wind up. What did she do with the telegrams?"

Ismael explained their disappearance, and added hastily as McCleary once more began to look choleric, "Actually, Tuan, the only part of Miss Reynolds' experience

that concerns us is the fact that she suppressed the telegrams, and that when the murderer attacked her it was to warn her not to tell us of her real identity."

McCleary's mouth gaped open. "He knew who she was? But what difference did that make to him?"

"That is what puzzles me. Miss Reynolds too can offer no reason. I find the American young women truly remarkable, so strange a mixture of wisdom and innocence, of courage and nerves. Even when I left she was exalted into the belief that she must bait herself to capture the murderer—like a young bull buffalo staked in a pit to lure a man-eating tiger."

McCleary rolled his eyes, and once more his worried fingers upended his dark hair. "I hope you put the fear of God into her, and told her not to mess things up any more."

Ismael sighed. "I told her, yes, but I have no faith in my persuasions. Look at all the American missionaries! Her final words to me were, 'But I must, don't you see I must try to make him betray himself to me? I am the only one that he fears, and if he so much as hints that I am not Helene Chambers, I will know who he is, and you can arrest him!' " The little Malay drew a deep, deploring breath. "The worst of it is, Tuan, that she is right. And that is one thing that no man, no matter what his race, can ever forgive a female."

For the first time in forty-eight hours, McCleary laughed; he was warmed by a sudden kinship to the lit-

tle Malay; after all, no matter what the difference in color, in creed, in politics or in methods of crime deduction, they were both bachelors.

Ismael's face relaxed into a smile, but his mind relaxed even more. McCleary had accepted Nancy's story, and he would appreciate the importance of guarding her. "I have talked over much, Tuan," he said. "What did you glean from your questioning of the guests and of the servants?"

McCleary rose restlessly to his feet and began to pace the damp stone floor of the basement office, while Ismael, still sitting stiffly upright, tried to segregate the facts from the flow of curses and invective that exploded from the inspector's lips.

"There you have it all," McCleary said more calmly. "Bosworth went indoors, so he says, to get a wrap for Mrs. Harvy. He didn't see the yellow sweater on the chair, but went to the wardrobe at the end of the hall. Hamilton had come up onto the veranda soaked to the skin, and Sullivan went into the dining room to get another glass for him. That makes two of them indoors, mind you—two of them so far. As if that wasn't enough, Hamilton decides that instead of a cold drink, he'd rather have a hot toddy, so he went in to look for one of the servants, and then, having been gone for several minutes, he says he changed his mind and went back to the veranda without calling any one.

"Mason says he didn't go out on the veranda after he

dropped the sweater but wandered into the living room to wait for Miss Chambers." He paused. "I think we'd better keep on calling her that, don't you, so that we won't slip up perhaps in front of other people?"

"Most assuredly, Tuan," Ismael approved. "I must remember to watch my own lips carefully."

McCleary nodded, and went on. "Where was I? Oh, yes, even Farnsworth isn't in the clear so far as alibis go, because the nurse decided he ought to have a sedative before we talked to him. The ice-water jug was empty, so she went out to the rear veranda, leaving his door open, and called a boy to bring her some water. She says she was gone for only two or three minutes, but who knows? She might have been gone the whole time the constable was down fetching us. I made the constable go through his motions while I timed him. It seems he stopped to speak to the constable on the front veranda who was grouching about a relief. If they talked say for two minutes, and it took him two to go through the house, out onto the veranda, down the steps and around to this door, two more to give us the message, and two to get back to his post, that means that the murderer had at least eight minutes in which to attack Miss Chambers and get away. He could have done the job in three at the outside."

"How did their stories check, Tuan?" Ismael asked, calmly.

"Oh, Sullivan, of course, says he saw Clive go through

the hall and come right back with a coat over his arm. Clive said he saw Sullivan in the dining room, but he didn't see the nurse, and that Farnsworth's door was closed. Mason says he didn't see any one, though he heard footsteps going back and forth. He says he had picked up a magazine from the table at the back of the room and got interested in a story, so he didn't realize how long Miss Chambers had been gone. Bosworth says he saw Hamilton come into the house as he went out, and Hamilton checks that. Hamilton says, too, that he saw the nurse leave Farnsworth's room and go out on the rear veranda; that was what made him change his mind about the toddy; thought he'd better not bother the servants if they were getting things for the nurse. Semut brought the water, but there was no one in the hall when he went through, though he heard the front door close as he came through the back one. The lights weren't on in the hall, you know, until you ordered the constable to put them on, but the dining room was lighted, and Mason had switched on the table lamp in the living room. Incidentally the light was still on, and there was an open copy of a *New Yorker* on the table. Mason said he left it when he heard you bang open Miss Chambers' door. He was afraid something had happened, and ran out into the hall. By the time the constable had called me, of course, every one was milling around out there, to say nothing of the servants and the constables; all of them pushing around, asking questions and trying to see into

the girl's room. Well, you know what it was like, and how long it took to herd them out."

"And where was Tuan Pearson? You didn't mention him," Ismael commented.

"No, I didn't. And that's another funny one. He says he was sitting over in the shadows by those living room screens, and never moved until he heard all the commotion. Mrs. Harvy was on the veranda too, the whole time, but she was lying back in one of the long chairs near the dining room, and had her eyes closed, so she didn't notice him at all. He could easily have slipped around the screens, cut through the living room without attracting Mason's attention, and then gone down the hall. Of course Pearson denies that he moved from his chair until he heard the row inside and Betty and every one rushed in, but he was as nervous as a witch, hands and feet twitching——"

Ismael shook his head. "It is certainly a difficult case. Shaitan seems to be protecting his own this time. There is no trace of the weapon in any of the houses, as I saw for myself after the constables failed to find it. There are no fingerprints, for the man who attacked Miss Reynolds was careful to wipe the handle on the wardrobe, and the knobs on the bedroom door. The bruises on her neck are not sufficiently discolored to show a fingerprint—it is obvious that he didn't intend to harm her and so pressed lightly. Even the weather has favored the murderer; the rain has washed away his tracks, and the mist has hidden him."

McCleary reached into a baggy pocket and took out a pipe which he slowly filled from a shabby suede pouch. "All we really have to go on is motive, and that brings us back to Bosworth and his paramour."

"They had a motive, Tuan, that I grant," Ismael said slowly, "but if they are guilty, we still have too many things unexplained; first, the shooting accident to Mr. Bosworth; then the disappearance of the reports that Mr. Harvy gave him; and lastly, the strange fear of Miss Reynolds, and the attack on her. Bosworth could have had no purpose in any of those things—he wouldn't shoot himself in the leg; he had no reason to steal the reports—all he had to do was to keep silent about them if he had wanted them suppressed; and above all, he had no reason to care whether it was Miss Chambers or Miss Reynolds who came to visit; both were friends of his wife, both unknown to him, and he to them."

McCleary puffed slowly on his pipe. "It's a nasty mess, however you look at it, and no sooner do we seem to be getting one bit clear, than something else happens. We'd just found out that Farnsworth was the one who turned off the lights, and I was getting ready to put Bosworth and Mrs. Harvy on the mat for lying about their meeting, when Miss Reynolds is attacked and we have to follow up that lead." His indignation was fanned by his memory. "Good Lord, it's been like that all through: I was trying to get a line on Mrs. Bosworth's murder, when Pearson knocks out the one person who was willing to

talk; then Farnsworth gets the wind up and disappears; you find Farnsworth, and before he can tell us anything, Harvy is killed; and while we are trying to sift that down, Miss Reynolds is attacked."

"Tuan Farnsworth would say nothing more, even when he was satisfied that it was the door which banged and not a shot?" Ismael asked.

"Farnsworth is a white-livered young pup," McCleary declared. "He knows something all right, but I doubt if we'll ever be able to drag it out of him until the murderer is under lock and key. He got himself so worked up when the crowd from the veranda started trooping into the house, that the nurse gave him another bromide."

Ismael frowned. There was something nagging at the back of his mind, something that had occurred to him just before he found the American girl unconscious, and now it was lost. He clucked his tongue in annoyance; he shouldn't have forgotten, it was important. Ah, well, it would come back to him later, when he relaxed his mind from all these other worries.

There was a knock on the outside door, and Semut's soft voice said, "Telephone for Che Ismael."

"Probably some answers to your cables," McCleary commented. "When you go up, would you mind asking Mrs. Harvy to come down here? I'll tackle her first about Farnsworth's story."

"Now, Mrs. Harvy—" McCleary's red face was grim a few minutes later when he addressed the woman grace-

fully draped in the chair opposite him—"I hope this time you will tell me the truth about what you did last evening, though it is my duty to warn you that you don't have to answer my questions."

"You mean," Betty gasped, looking at him with wide, terrified blue eyes, "that you suspect me?"

McCleary nodded, impervious to her pathetic fragility.

"But you can't! I had nothing to do with Lydia's death—I know nothing about it! I was miles away from here—or at least nearly a mile—nowhere near the house. Oh, how can you think such a thing!" There was a very real note of distress in her voice.

"We know that you lied to us about the lights being on in your house all evening. We know that you met Bosworth."

The woman's face paled beneath her rouge. "How do you know?" she whispered.

McCleary concealed his satisfaction. "It's enough that we do know. You weren't home, you met Bosworth, your lover, and you were up here with him while he killed his wife."

"No, no!" she moaned, wringing her small jewelled fingers. "It isn't so. We never came here, we never even crossed the road. I didn't mean to lie to you about the lights; I didn't know they'd been off. They were burning when I left, and they were on when I got back. We only talked for a few minutes—we didn't have time to come so far."

"Why did you meet him?" the officer asked, and repeated perfunctorily, "You don't have to answer that question if you don't want to."

"I'd rather tell you. I've nothing to hide," Betty said. "Anything is better than having you think that I killed Lydia, or that I knew about it. I wanted to see Clive. He was to have come to tea, but instead, that awful Sullivan person took him to Batu Pahat. I had to see him. He'd been keeping away from me ever since Sullivan came back. I ran up here after tea—" her head drooped a little; "I pretended that I wanted to help Lydia with her supper party, but I knew she wouldn't let me, of course. I left a note here on Clive's desk for him, saying I would wait for him at the turn in our road at nine fifteen, and he'd have to slip away from the wayong. I knew he'd come—he wouldn't let me stay there alone in the dark waiting."

"Why did you have to see him so urgently? You would have had an opportunity to see him later at supper, wouldn't you?"

"That wouldn't have been any good," she said. "Lydia would have been here then, and Sullivan. I could have managed Lydia, but not the combination of Lydia and Sullivan. Don't you see?" She sounded slightly hysterical. "I had to know that Clive still cared for me—I was afraid he might have had another attack of conscience."

"What happened when you met?"

"Oh, everything was all right. I can always manage

him when people don't interfere. Lydia was never his type—she was too strong for him. He needs some one dependent upon him, not some one he can lean on. That's been his whole trouble; he's always had Mike Sullivan, and then Lydia, to tell him what he ought to do, or to do it for him; when what he has really needed was some one weaker than himself that he'd have to protect." She leaned toward the officer, and for the first time her face was soft and appealing. "I know what you think about me, but you are quite wrong. I really love Clive; he's the only man I have ever really loved. Lydia was too good for him, just as John was too good for me; neither of us could measure up to their standards. John and Lydia were both crazy about the Far East, and both Clive and I loathed it."

"So you thought that if you could persuade Clive to run off with you, Mr. Harvy and Mrs. Bosworth might make a go of it too, just shift partners—was that your idea?" Betty nodded. "It was the only sensible solution."

"But it didn't come off," McCleary announced. "You realized that Clive didn't really care for you; so you decided to get rid of Lydia and your husband, and so force his hand."

"No, Clive does care about me. He was just afraid to make the break, he didn't want to hurt Lydia. But in time she would have driven him to it."

"And now, you are independent. No matter what Bosworth decides to do, you have twenty thousand pounds

and can go back to England and the life you crave!"

"Yes," Betty flared, "I can and I will. I'm sick of the East and everything in it, and for the first time in my life my happiness isn't dependent on the whims of any man. I've told you the truth. You can take it or leave it, but I warn you, you can't make a case against either Clive or me, for we're innocent. However, I am going to advise Clive to get a lawyer, and to cable his father immediately."

McCleary scratched his chin. If she got old man Bosworth steamed up, there would certainly be hell to pay, unless McCleary could present an airtight case. Ismael's return saved him the embarrassment of answering the woman's threat, and with as much confidence as he could summon, he dismissed her, saying, "I'll talk to you again later." Of course she'd tell Bosworth about the interview, but that didn't matter much; if their story was faked, they already had it down pat. Bosworth might get his wind up waiting for his interview, and prove more malleable than Mrs. Harvy had.

"Did you get a line on any one?" he asked, turning to Ismael as Mrs. Harvy slammed shut the door. "Whew, that woman is a hellcat—she ran the gauntlet from near hysterics to threats; one minute declaring that Bosworth was the only man she ever loved, and in the next breath exulting because she'd have her husband's insurance money and would be independent of all men."

"Shallow water is easily stirred, Tuan," Ismael said.

"I have several interesting lines of information, all spreading in a different direction. Tuan Campbell read me the replies from Scotland Yard and from the New York police. I thought it better to act through him so that no one in Kluang, or on this estate, would know of my inquiries or their results."

For a second McCleary looked annoyed, and then his face cleared. "Of course my office would have been discreet, but the operators might have let the cat out of the bag. Get on with the story."

"Scotland Yard reports first that there have been persistent rumors lately about the instability of this estate. Mr. Bosworth senior has vainly tried to run them to earth; he says there is no truth in the assertions, that although the production has fallen off to a considerable extent, he had every confidence in Mr. Harvy's ability to discover the trouble and rectify it. He has been very abrupt with offers on the part of various large rubber interests who showed a desire to purchase the estate. The gossip has had a bad effect on the stockholders of his company, and before he could convince them that there was nothing wrong, many shares had been unloaded on the market. He and other members of the Board of Directors offered to purchase any shares, and that stopped their panic.

"These murders won't help the estate any," McCleary said grimly. "It's nothing short of a miracle that the newspapers haven't got wind of it already."

Ismael glanced again at his notes. "There is nothing against John Harvy; he was well liked, and the directors of the company had great confidence in him. They had not the same confidence, however, in Clive Bosworth. It was only the fact that his father had the controlling interest that gave him this position. Their distrust was not based on fear of his dishonesty, but because of his former reputation as a 'playboy,' and the fact that he doesn't take his work seriously.

"Nothing is known about Mrs. Harvy, or Mrs. Bosworth. Hamilton, however, had some difficulty with the authorities five years ago when he was chief engineer on the *Osiris*. There was a drunken brawl in a pub in Liverpool, and Hamilton badly injured the first mate. For a time they thought the man was going to die and Hamilton was held by the police. The officer recovered, and at the insistence of the Steamship Company, who had already discharged Hamilton, refused to prosecute. Hamilton insisted he remembered nothing about the affair, that his mind was a blank. He couldn't get another berth, and drifted out East, where Harvy got him his present job.

"Mike Sullivan had a good war record, enlisting when he was sixteen. He was twice mentioned in despatches before he was invalided. He is the only living member of his family. His father was killed in action, and his younger brother and his mother died within a week of the father. He has a very good income, derived from his

mother's estate. Her father was a pioneer in the rubber industry and had large holdings in several big American rubber companies. Of late Mike has displayed an unusual interest in the activities of those companies, and has made inquiries in London through a private detective agency about the status of the Semang Rubber Estate. Mr. Bosworth senior speaks very highly of him and his devotion to Clive, but regrets his lack of ambition."

Ismael laid down the page he had finished. "So much for Scotland Yard. Here is what the New York police reported: a list of plays in which Mrs. Bosworth, formerly Lydia Handly, had small parts, and notice of her marriage to Clive Bosworth. Also a shorter list of plays in which Helene Chambers appeared—we aren't interested in her now, of course. David Farnsworth's father is a vice-president in a large American rubber company. David is the only son; went to a number of expensive private schools in the States, and several colleges, but never stayed long. His father finally sent him out East to get him away from his mother's influence and try to make a man of him. Jim Mason's father is the manager of a rival rubber company in the Middle West, but his history differs from Farnsworth's, he was expelled from college, but went directly to work in his father's factory, and eventually came out to this estate in order to learn the business from every angle."

The Malay's face was suddenly sober, and he hesi-

tated a second before continuing his recitation. "Bill Pearson's story, Tuan, is a sad one. His people come from old Atlanta families, where his father is in the export business. When Bill's sister Sheilah was born fourteen years ago, his mother went insane. She had been slightly deranged at her son's birth, but had recovered. However, from the second birth she did not recover and eventually had to be placed in a private institution. A short time ago, the girl Sheilah developed dementia præcox, and she, too, is now in the same institution."

"Good God!" McCleary exclaimed, his eyes opening very wide. "I told you he was acting queer. Look at the way he attacked Farnsworth; the way he sits and broods—like a Malay before he runs amok. You should have told me about him first, so that we could have gotten him away quietly. He may go haywire any minute and kill some one else!"

Ismael's voice was calm. "I am not a doctor, Tuan, but I know that it is not unusual for a woman to lose her reason at childbirth, and I also know that dementia præcox is not hereditary. If you were to assume that Tuan Pearson is insane because of his mother and sister, you might actually drive him over the abyss into which he is now staring."

McCleary frowned. "I can't understand you, Ismael. Standing there shaking your head, and refusing to do anything—with a maniac loose upstairs!"

Ismael clapped his hand to his forehead. "That is it!

Now I remember that little maggot that was gnawing at my mind. Tuan, when you went up the stairs to see Tuan Farnsworth, was the door at the head of these stairs locked?"

The inspector looked blank. "No, no; I don't think it was. I just turned the knob and went in." His expression changed to one of consternation. "Good Lord! it should have been locked, of course—what——"

A woman's scream, shrill with terror, echoed above their heads.

Ismael recognized the voice of the half-caste nurse, and even as he dashed across the room, his heavy heart told him that in spite of all the protection the police had provided, the murderer had struck again—the frightened young American Tuan would never be able to tell them what he knew.

CHAPTER XV

As Nancy slowly opened the front door and stepped out onto the veranda, it seemed to her, in her exalted state of self-sacrifice, that she would be able to look into the faces turned expectantly toward her, and point an unerring finger at the murderer. She wasn't sure whether she would recognize him by his blanched, cowering figure, or whether justice itself, by some mysterious method, would make her aware of the truth.

It was a bitter disappointment, therefore, to find that nothing in the way of miracles happened at all; that the familiar faces looked the same to her; that every one acted in a normal way to her sudden appearance. Jim Mason sprang up with an eager welcome, and rushed to her; Mike Sullivan brought forward the most comfortable chair; Clive Bosworth appeared at her side with a whisky soda in one hand, a can of cigarettes in the other; Bill Pearson roused himself from his reveries long enough to produce a lighted match, and Ronald Hamilton untwined his length of limbs from his chair and came solemnly to shake her hand. "It's verra guid to hae ye wi' us safe an' sound." Betty Harvy's voice was cooing as she said languidly, "You should never have gone in there

alone; apparently the murderer was simply waiting for a chance at you. I wonder why that could be, when you are a stranger here. Unless of course, you met some one before."

"No," Nancy said steadily; "I didn't know any of you until last night—was it really only last night?" She shook her head. "So much has happened that it might have been last week, or last month, or last year."

Questions were pelted at her from all sides: "What happened?" "Didn't you see something?" "What did he do?" "Did he say anything?" "Wasn't there any way you could recognize him?"

Ismael had warned her what to say. She mustn't admit that the murderer had spoken at all; he would be listening for that; trying to gauge from her first remarks just how much she had told the police. She must let him think that she had heeded his warnings; and she must remember that there were two policemen close at hand, one standing beside the front steps, one concealed behind the screens that separated the front of the living room from the veranda. Ismael had told her to sit there. Was there any significance in the fact that Mike Sullivan had placed her chair on the opposite side near the dining room windows; any special reason why he wanted her to sit there? Was there perhaps poison in the drink Clive Bosworth had given her? A knife concealed in Jim Mason's hand—she shivered as he touched her arm. Was Hamilton's deep-throated voice the one which had whis-

pered through the closet door? That one hadn't had any Scotch accent, but she had noticed that Hamilton's accent rather waxed and waned—when he wanted to, he sounded just like any one else. She glanced at Bill Pearson's slim brown fingers as he lighted another match for her cigarette which, in her abstraction, had gone out. Were they the hands that had choked off her scream, thrust her into the blackness of the wardrobe? She didn't know; it was as dark a mystery as ever; but, she had to get a grip on herself and not let her imagination run rampant. After all, only one person to whom she had to speak wished her ill; the others were sincere.

Smiling, she shook her head at them all, and then to Mike, "If you don't mind, I'd rather sit back there in the shadows—no, don't bother." She moved quickly across the damp grass rugs and seated herself in a vacant chair beside the living room screens, outside the orange halos of the lighted lamps. "But," Jim Mason protested, "you're so far away from us there. I don't think you ought to sit with your back to those screens."

"She's safe enough," Mike Sullivan growled. "We're all here, aren't we? No need for her to move until one of us goes indoors."

There was an oppressive silence as the significance of Mike's remark reached their consciousness, a silence broken only by the drip, drop of the rain, the soft swish of the night breeze through the lime trees. Clive Bosworth was the first to speak, "Oh, I say, old chap, why

keep harpin' on that? Let's hear what Miss Chambers has to say."

Chairs were shifted forward, sideways, until, to her discomfort, Nancy was confronted by a semicircle of eager faces, white where the orange light touched them, sinisterly black where the shadows obscured their features.

"There's really nothing to tell," she said slowly. "I just went to the wardrobe in my room to get some sort of wrap—a sweater, or coat; so I didn't bother switching on the lights, I was so sure I could find it at once. While I was fumbling inside the closet, I thought I heard a floor board creak, and then before I could turn around, I realized that there was some one behind me. A hand grabbed me backwards, and two hands went around my throat so that I couldn't scream. Something woolly was wrapped around my head a second later and I was shoved face foremost into the closet again. The door was closed, but luckily for me, there was no key in the lock, so when I managed to get to my feet, I opened the door quite easily. I had just backed out into my room, when Ismael banged open the bedroom door. I thought it was the murderer coming back to finish me, and over I keeled. So stupid to faint twice in twenty-four hours, wasn't it? When I came to, I was on the bed, and Ismael was there. That's all." No need to tell them of her abject panic in that horrible wardrobe, of the way she had held her breath, listening and straining every sense before she

ventured to move—it might have been seconds, it might have been hours. But no one must know how terrified she had been; how terrified she was even now.

“Didn’t the fellow say anything to you? Why did he attack you at all?” Mike Sullivan demanded.

“And,” chimed in Jim Mason, “why, if he wanted to kill you, didn’t he do it then and there? If he didn’t want to hurt you, what did he want?”

“I don’t know,” Nancy said. “It all seems so pointless. It isn’t as though I knew anything, had anything to conceal that would help him.” She was suddenly tired of their questions, and annoyed by Betty’s Mona Lisa smile. “The only thing that has occurred to me—” she hesitated. Every one leaned forward eagerly, and she said slowly, “He might have mistaken me for Mrs. Harvy.” In the shadows she could permit the laughter that came into her eyes as Betty Harvy emitted an exclamation, and to her annoyance found herself suddenly the center of the group.

“How can you say such a thing?” she squeaked, her voice so angry that it was beyond control. “What would I be in your room for?”

“Well, I didn’t reason as far as that,” Nancy said, carefully keeping her amusement out of her voice. “I just thought that since we were the only white women here, and I was a complete stranger, as you’ve emphasized yourself, he, the murderer I mean, would have more cause to frighten you than me. And you were cold, as I was, and we are the same size approximately.”

After that theory was adequately discussed, and eventually rejected under Betty's vehement disclaimers, attention was once more focused on Nancy. "Was anything missing in your room?" Clive Bosworth asked. "Money or valuables?"

"I have neither. Nothing that any one could possibly want," Nancy said with a twisted smile, remembering how pathetically bereft she was of anything she could commercialize.

"Perhaps," Bill Pearson said suddenly, "the murderer had left something there—the knife, or something he had to get before you found it."

"By Jove, old boy," Clive exclaimed, "that must have been it—that would explain everything. He was in the room looking for it when she came in, and he was afraid she'd spot him, so he shoves her in the closet!"

Nancy shook her head. "He couldn't have been in there first, because he wrapped Lydia's yellow sweater around my head, and that was in the dining room on a chair when I went down the hall. You remember, Jim?"

Jim Mason frowned, and then his face brightened. "Yes, I remember, if it's the sweater I brought you and you were so uppish about. I didn't know what color it was, but I dropped it on the chair when you refused to wear it——"

"Well then, instead of being in the room first," Clive said, "he followed you, afraid you'd find the knife or whatever it was before he could get it."

"Well, perhaps," Nancy admitted dubiously. "But I don't see why he'd have hidden anything in my room. If Lydia had been the only one killed with the knife, it might have been possible; but Mr. Harvy was killed with the same weapon this morning and whoever killed him had the whole estate, to say nothing of the jungle, to hide it in. I can't see how, or why, or when, he could hide the weapon in my room."

"Yes, of course," Clive said in a dejected tone, "that won't wash."

"Are you sure it was a man?" Mike Sullivan asked, and at his words, Betty Harvy stiffened.

"Yes. That is all I am sure of," Nancy replied. "I don't know, but I'm sure the hands that grabbed me were a man's hands. And I don't believe he was looking for anything. He didn't have time, and none of my belongings were disturbed. Besides Ismael searched the whole place and he couldn't even find a fingerprint, much less anything material—I mean, no fingerprints except Saidi's and mine. And it wasn't Saidi because she is shorter than I, and whoever grabbed me was a lot taller."

Surreptitiously the people on the porch began mentally to measure each other, but soon gave it up—every one there, except the two women, was six feet, or over.

The sharp tinkle of the telephone cut into their gloomy silence, and every one strained his ears to catch Semut's low-voiced replies. A moment later he padded out onto the veranda, and in answer to Clive's sharp question,

said, "For Ismael, Tuan—a call from Johore Bahru."

"Now what wud that be?" Hamilton speculated aloud as Semut hurried down the steps and disappeared into the darkness. They were still debating the possibilities when Ismael's bulky form appeared in one of the circles of light, "Tuan McCleary would like to talk to you, Mrs. Harvy, if you don't mind."

Clive Bosworth stumbled to his feet. "I'll go with you, Betty——"

Ismael shook his head. "Sorry, Tuan, she must go alone, but Semut will take her to the door, and wait outside."

Bosworth held open the door, and with a final murmur of warning, or assurance, waited until her slender figure, escorted by Semut, vanished around the corner of the house. "How about a spot of dinner?" he asked, turning to the others. "Rotten host, I am. Must all be feelin' peckish, eh what?"

"Good idea, old man, if there's anything in the house to eat," Jim Mason exclaimed.

"Ought to be," Clive grunted; "told the cookie to order plenty. Got to keep them busy, you know." He waved a vague hand toward the servants' quarters. "I'll see what progress they've made, and when things will be ready to serve."

"You see," Nancy said in soft triumph to Mike Sullivan, who had leaned forward to pass her a cigarette, "he's much better when he's on his own."

Mike scowled. "I'm afraid he's getting in deeper all the time with that Harvy cat. She's appealing to his chivalry, and he's so credulous he can't see through her." His sudden smile mocked her. "Now, if it was you, I wouldn't have a word to say."

Nancy was annoyed, although she wasn't sure why. "I am quite capable of managing my own affairs without any assistance," she snapped.

"I doubt it," he grinned. "You certainly haven't been very successful so far. On second thought, perhaps it's just as well that your type doesn't appeal to Clive. I'd have two babes in the woods on my hands then."

"You flatter yourself," she said coldly, and turned to smile up at Jim Mason.

"Have you forgiven me, Helene?" Jim stepped between Nancy and Mike.

"Forgiven you, for what?" she asked, refusing to meet the mockery in Mike's green eyes, or to watch the jaunty set of his shoulders as he strolled across to Ronald Hamilton.

"For letting you go to your room alone. I ought to have gone for your wrap myself, or at least tagged along to look after you. Every time I think of that murderous brute touching you, it drives me wild." His fingers caressed the bruise on her throat. Panic stricken, she shrank away from his hand. "Don't! Don't!"

"Poor little girl. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you. I'm an awful dub where women are concerned, al-

ways putting my foot into things." He sat down humbly in the nearest chair.

"I'm just jittery," Nancy admitted, "and when you touched me—it brought it all back."

"Good God!" Jim exclaimed, staring at her with accusing eyes. "You don't mean you think I was the one! That I'd harm a hair of your head? Can't you see how I feel about you? I want to look out for you; I resent every one who comes near you. I'm jealous of them, and at the same time, I'm afraid for you. How do I know which of them attacked you, what he may be planning? It's driving me nuts."

Nancy was startled by his vehemence, and at the deep note of emotion in his voice. "Why, you hardly know me," she protested. "Please don't say anything more. Don't look at me like that; every one is watching."

He jerked himself erect in his chair, and glanced self-consciously around the veranda. "I don't care; I'm not ashamed of my feelings," he muttered, and then in a pleading whisper, "Helene, marry me. Marry me quickly so that I can look out for you!"

It was comforting, Nancy admitted to herself, to have some one she could depend upon, even though it was impossible to take him seriously. At least if he thought he was in love with her, she could eliminate him from the people who would have to be watched. He wasn't handsome, like Bill Pearson; or attractive as Mike Sullivan was; he didn't even have Clive Bosworth's charm

and breeding, but he was thoroughly nice, and he had been consistently kind to her from the beginning. She leaned toward him. "Don't, Jim—not now—I'm too bewildered by all that has happened to be able to think."

Jim Mason turned and stared earnestly into her face, and then his rather infrequent smile crept across his broad, homely face, illuminating it into attractiveness. "All right, I won't say anything more now."

Ismael finished his low-voiced conversation on the telephone, and crossed the veranda, a sheaf of white notes in his brown hand, but he hurried down the steps without speaking. Clive Bosworth returned from his interview with the cook. "Dinner at 8.30," he announced, and moved deliberately to the veranda door to peer through its rain-silvered screen.

"Halloo, here you are," he exclaimed as Betty's slim figure emerged from the darkness. Semut, who had been following her at a respectful distance, dropped back and vanished into the rain.

"What's left of me," Betty sighed. "But I don't think I came off so badly at the end."

"He put you through it, did he?" Clive sounded anxious.

"Rather," she said, dropping into the chair she had vacated earlier, and motioning to Clive to sit down. "McCleary knew about our meeting last night; that I was away from the house; and, of course, he had jumped to the conclusion that we had been up here killing Lydia;

and then that I led poor John this morning into an ambush to let you kill him." In spite of the fact that she knew everybody on the veranda was listening, Betty made no effort to lower her voice.

"So that's where you were last night!" Mike stared accusingly at Clive. "Why the devil didn't you say so?"

"Oh," Clive exclaimed blankly. "Did you see me go out of the wayong? I didn't know—thought I was pretty nippy about it." His smile was conciliatory. "Nothing to it, really. I just slipped off to see Betty. Didn't want any one to get the wrong idea about it, don't you know, when I found what had happened to Lydia. Bowled me over so that I've only been about half functioning ever since—things have happened so damn fast."

"Anyway," Betty said, "I think you ought to cable your father, Clive, and then get a good lawyer. You've nothing to hide now, you can't whitewash me, and as things look to the police, you and I had the best motives."

"Motive?" Clive exclaimed. "I didn't have any motive—I was a rotten husband to Lydia, but I was awf'ly fond of her, and she knew it."

"That isn't what the police think," Betty said drily. "They think you wanted to marry me; that you killed Lydia for that reason, and then killed John to get hold of the insurance money, so that we could go back to England to live."

Clive flushed to the roots of his fair hair. "Of all the bally rot! Why, it never occurred to either one of us,

did it, Betty? We were bally fools enough to compromise ourselves, but as for anything serious! Good Lord!" He ran an agitated hand through his hair. "I haven't any intention of going back to England. I'm going to stick right here on this estate and make something of it—made up my mind today; and felt better right away. Something to do for Lydia and John."

Betty shrugged. "You can do as you like, of course; but personally the sooner I can get back to civilization the better."

Mike Sullivan said slowly, "It might be a good idea to cable your father, Clive; it's bound to be in all the papers as soon as the first reporter gets wind of it. He'd be prepared then. Didn't you realize after McCleary talked to you what a tough spot you were in?"

Clive blinked. "I'm afraid I didn't take it very seriously. I thought he was just taking a pot shot at each of us in turn, hoping to surprise a confession out of us. You see, I knew I didn't kill Lydia, and I couldn't believe any one would really consider it," he said naively. "I can't yet. Anyway, I'm not going to bother my father with my troubles ahead of time, and I'm not going to have any bally lawyer hanging around."

Mike and Betty, for the first time in agreement, both started to protest, but Clive's face became momentarily more stubborn.

"Is this all the whusky ye've got, Bosworth?" Hamilton interrupted. "Because if it is, I'm hopin' no one else

wants a drink this nicht." He tipped the contents of the bottle into a glass and drained it at a gulp.

"Better go easy, Hamilton," Bill Pearson warned, his voice rising above Clive's shout, "Boy, kassi whisky!"

Hamilton smacked his lips. "Ye'd all be better for a drink—instead o' mouthin' and gawpin' and wonderin' aboot every one here. Naethin' like a bellyfu' o' liquor to dull the feel o' a knife in yer ribs."

"Oh, don't," Nancy begged. "It's bad enough thinking about it, without putting it into words."

Hamilton's somber glance shifted from the empty whisky bottle to Nancy's white face. "Aye, lass, you do well to be fearfu'. 'Twas o' you I was thinking. Go you to the police noo afore 'tis too late. Tell them a' ye ken. 'Tis for your ain guid that I'm speakin'——"

"I don't know what you are talking about," Nancy protested, moistening her dry lips.

"Aye, ye do," the Scotchman contradicted. "You think you are sae clever that you can catch out the murderer your ain self, but you are nought but a fool to think it. I dinna ken what it is you ken aboot him—'twas for something sure that he choked you a whilst back. There was more to it than ye've telt. Like enow he spoke to you, and ye're hopin' to recognize his voice, or saething aboot his hands. I've seen you watching hands ever since ye came oot, and turnin't yer hand this way an' that to catch the sound o' a voice." His long gangling arms gestured wildly, "Go you to the police now, afore it is too late!"

Every eye was focussed on Nancy, and she could think of nothing light and casual that might counteract the effect of Hamilton's solemn warning; all she could do was to think dully, "That's torn it. The old fool has taken away my last chance. Nothing can save me now—no one."

CHAPTER XVI

The half-caste nurse was still screaming, as shrilly and automatically as a police siren, as Ismael and McCleary burst through the door at the head of the stairs. The bed was only a few feet from the door, and, ignoring the nurse, the two men hurried toward the sheet-covered figure that lay there, so ominously quiet, the head face downward between the two pillows. McCleary pulled a pillow impatiently aside, while Ismael stooped to lift the dark, suffused face. Slowly he laid it back—there was no need for words. They both had seen the cord twisted tightly around his neck.

“Shut up, you!” McCleary whirled on the screaming nurse, and when she still kept on with her nerve-wracking shrieks, he flung the contents of a glass of water into her face. The last scream ended in a spluttering gasp, and McCleary waited grimly until she had caught her breath and began automatically to wipe her streaming face.

“Now then, tell us what happened.”

“I don’t know, I don’t know!” she wept. “I just found him like this, and then I screamed.”

“We know about the screaming. Just tell us who was in here.”

"No one, not a soul. And I didn't leave the room either," she stated.

McCleary looked incredulous. "Well, then, tell us what happened from the time I left."

"One moment, Tuan. Let her sit down and calm herself a little while I speak to those outside. We cannot hear her over those voices." The nurse sank gratefully into a chair on the far side of the room, while the Malay opened the door and spoke quietly to the worried, excited group of people in the hall, "Tuan Farnsworth is dead. That is all we know at present; the nurse just discovered that his spirit had fled, and so she screamed. When we learn more, I will tell you. You will help us best now, if you will all go back to the veranda, and keep as calm as you can."

He ignored the eager questions, the grumbles and appeals, and spoke in swift Malay to the constable on duty. Apparently he was satisfied with the reply, but nevertheless he raised his voice, and the guards on duty in the living room, and on the veranda poked their heads into the hall to assure him that they were "truly" at their posts. "Now go," he addressed the white people and the servants; "I mean this. You will be safe if you will stay together, but you mustn't delay me longer."

McCleary was impatiently tapping his foot, and glaring at the door, as Ismael returned to the room, but the nurse had recovered some of her professional veneer of calm, and seemed anxious to speak. "I gave Mr. Farns-

worth his second bromide as soon as you left the room—I was already mixing it, Mr. McCleary, at your suggestion. For a minute or two, while the noise in the hall was at its worst, he clung to my hand, but he quieted almost immediately. Coming on top of the first draught so quickly, it acted with great speed. He was very susceptible to soporifics anyway, I had discovered, but in his excitable state, I thought it a good thing for him to get a good sleep. I fixed his pillows and his bedclothes, and by the time I had rinsed out the glass in the bathroom,” she nodded toward the door at the rear of the room where a light disclosed part of a stone floor and a white enamel sink, “he was asleep. I felt his pulse, which was good, pulled the bedclothes over his shoulder—he was lying on his side, his head burrowed into the pillow—then I lowered the shade on the lamp so that it threw a shadow across the bed. I turned the key in the lock of the door opening into the hall, and then, having nothing more I could do for my patient, I decided that I would bathe myself and change into a fresh uniform. That, I thought, would help me keep awake, since I had been on duty all last night, on another case, and had only taken this one to oblige the good Doctor Sparkes. Here, too, I had had a strenuous day, and I realized that I must be alert for the time when the bromide wore off, and the poor young man would begin demanding attention.” She paused, and her brown eyes, with their faintly yellowish whites, turned from one policeman to the

other. McCleary cleared his throat, but he could find no fault with her behavior. "Go on," he muttered huskily.

"I left the bathroom door ajar, so that I could hear if my patient called me. I could have heard that even above the running of the water; but I heard nothing. I bathed and dressed, slowly, I don't know how long it took me. I had the whole night to use up, you will understand, save what part of it my patient needed. I felt refreshed when I came out of the bathroom; Mr. Farnsworth hadn't changed his position, and the bed was still in shadow. The rain started up again about that time, if you will remember?" She looked expectantly at McCleary, who shook his head: "I don't know, it's been going off and on in spurts all day; I don't even notice it now." Ismael blinked his almond eyes. "I remember that it grew ferocious about seven o'clock and that it kept on, as it still is." For the first time they seemed to realize the beating of the rain on the roof, no longer a rustling, for the atap was too sodden, but a steady drum-drum; and the trees outside loaned their sullen, reluctant swishing as the wind shook their rain-heavy branches.

The nurse continued in her rather flat voice: "That was what I heard, all I heard. If it had been a still night, I would have found myself breathing with my patient, one-two-three—a nurse cannot help that, and, in a heart case, it is very disturbing—the irregularity, and the way one must, somehow, accompany it with one's own breathing." McCleary shuffled his feet—this was getting

nowhere. What he wanted was facts, and the sight of Ismael gravely following the nurse's intake and outgo of breath made him purple with anger.

"And then," Ismael said gently.

"Oh, I was manicuring my fingernails by this light over here," she pointed with a yellow hand to the light that was shining down on both Ismael and McCleary, and the white man drew back involuntarily from the litter of buffers, nail enamel, and other small bottles on the table at his elbow.

"Suddenly the rain let up. I hardly realized it at first. Everything so quiet all at once. I kept on for a minute or two doing my last finger, and then suddenly I knew there was something wrong. I didn't stop to think what it was; I just jumped for my patient, spilling everything in my lap on the floor." Both men glanced down at a scattering of emery boards and a pair of manicure scissors. "I had realized without knowing it that I didn't hear my patient's breathing. His face was still burrowed in his pillow, and apparently he was lying just as I had left him, and yet I knew—" Hastily she pressed a handkerchief against her lips and gulped once or twice. "I knew that he was dead." She drew a deep breath and finished calmly. "I lifted his head, and saw his face. I thought for a moment he had been suffocated by the pillows—drugged as he was, you know. And then I noticed the cord around his neck. It was the realization that he had been murdered, with no one in the room, that

made me lose control and scream as I did." She pushed a weary amber hand through her blue-black hair. "I don't understand it. But, awful as it is, I am glad that it wasn't an accident, that his death was no reflection on my nursing."

McCleary had a dozen questions to ask, but the nurse was unshaken in her story. Ismael moved heavily toward the door that opened on to the basement stairway. "Here is the key, Tuan." He bent over and picked up a long rusty key from the rug between the door and the bed. "Too late we know what happened."

The white officer blinked and sprang to his feet. "What do you mean, 'we know what happened'?—damned if I know!"

"Sometime this afternoon, or this evening, probably when the nurse left the room to get drinking water, the murderer stepped inside the room. Nay, he needn't have entered the room—just reached three feet with his arm, turned the key which opened the door, and moved away. Doubtless that was just as he left Miss Reynolds' room. By so doing, he left the way open to silence Farnsworth when he had later an opportunity. That opportunity came quickly, the first time every one rushed indoors, when I banged Miss Chambers' door, and found her lying on the floor. There was much confusion, you will recall, and the constable from the veranda followed the crowd indoors. I think, Tuan," Ismael looked thoughtful, "the murderer first slipped behind the living room

screen, and then when every one had gone inside, went swiftly from the veranda, around the house to the office, and up the stairs. By that time, the nurse had gone into the bathroom; or he may have waited outside the door until he heard water running—the rest was simple. He had only to step to the bed where his victim lay in a drugged sleep and slip the cord around his neck, pull it tight, and arrange the pillows.”

McCleary nodded. “It must have happened about like that,” he admitted, “but think of the risk he took! The downstairs office was empty only about half an hour, all told, and during fifteen minutes of that time, you and I were here in this room.” The officer pushed a weary hand across his forehead. “If only I could remember which of them were in the hall, and which were in Miss Chambers’ room, I could figure out who was missing; but with every one milling around, and jabbering, servants and guests and constables—if that bloody fool had stayed on the veranda, this wouldn’t have happened. He’ll hear about that!”

There was a gleam of satisfaction in Ismael’s eyes; the constables had been a thorn in the flesh throughout the case, good enough Malays, but untrained and stupid in comparison with the Johore police. Sensing Ismael’s silent criticism, McCleary said defensively, “They are good men but they are not used to a case of this kind; give them a good clean case of gang robbery, or a straight native killing, and you couldn’t ask for better men.

They're out of their element in a white murder, just as I am."

Ismael changed the subject; in his opinion that didn't excuse the lack of discipline, the casual disregard of orders. "The doctor should be notified, Tuan, and the body removed; and then, we must question the people on the veranda, see whether any of them noticed anything amiss."

"I suppose you are right, but I am sick to death of asking questions, and I haven't any faith at all in the replies I get, when I get any. Well, come on, there's no use putting off the evil hour any longer. Though mark my words, it is going to be time wasted."

McCleary's gloomy prediction proved to be correct. None of the frightened, overwrought guests had been able to contribute anything of value; each could account only for his own actions at the time; the rush into the house and their anxiety to know what had happened, concern for Miss Chambers. Certainly by the time McCleary had herded them out onto the veranda, every one was present, but who had been missing for part of the time, no one could, or would, tell. The same situation held with the servants; they had run into the house, those who hadn't been too frightened, to see what the noise had portended, and had hung around in order to satisfy their curiosity, until the Tuan Mata-Mata had hurried them off about their business. The constable on duty on the veranda announced quite simply that with

all the white people in the house, he had naturally followed to see what had happened. He could be of more use indoors, he thought, than outside guarding an empty group of chairs. If, as he thought, the murderer was inside, then it was his duty to protect the people he was to guard, by going with them, and despite the blast of McCleary's rage, his stolid face maintained its approval of his own reasoning.

Doctor Sparke, looking very much harassed, had come and gone, and Farnsworth's body had been carried away to lie briefly beside those of the other victims of the murderer in the tiny morgue at Kluang. A dried, belated dinner had been served, in which no one had been interested, and at midnight the guests had been despatched to their beds.

Ismael lay back in a long wicker chair which he had dragged into the hall of the bungalow. The back of the chair rested against the rear door, and the long, brightly lit hall stretched in front of him, the blank, shut faces of the three bedrooms, the dark yawning maws of the living and dining rooms, and then the brown scabby paint of the front door. In spite of the fact that he had had no sleep for eighteen hours, he knew there was no danger of his relaxing his vigilance; his eyes were wide and staring; his ears strained to catch every sound in the sleeping house: the spasmodic beat of rain on the roof, the soft scurry of lizards and mice across the atap thatch, the twitching of the night breeze through the

dripping lime trees. He heard the occasional snore emitted by the exhausted McCleary who had thrown himself down on the couch in the living room, the restless turning and tossing of Mike Sullivan or Clive Bosworth as they twisted about on the bed so recently occupied by young Farnsworth. Mike had given up his room to Betty Harvy, at the diffident suggestion of Clive who obviously dreaded sleeping alone in that desecrated bed. A constable had accompanied Jim Mason to his bachelor quarters, and another was guarding Pearson and Hamilton; and this time, Ismael thought with grim satisfaction, the policemen would perform their duties. The two remaining constables were patrolling the grounds outside the Bosworth house. Ismael could hear the scrunch of their shoes at periodic intervals on the gravel driveway, the rattle of the doorknobs as they assured themselves that no one had entered, the rattle of shutters as they in their turn were tested.

Despite all those precautions, however, Ismael had taken upon himself the guarding of the American girl. The diabolic cleverness and speed with which the murderer had killed the hapless Farnsworth had shaken Ismael's confidence in every one except himself, and he was determined that, for this night at least, Nancy's safety should rest on his shoulders.

Why, he wondered, did the murderer fear the American girl? Obviously, it was due to the telegrams, and to her adoption of Helene Chambers' identity; but why

was it so important to him that she persevere in the role of Miss Chambers? Could it be that the murderer knew, from some indiscretion of Mrs. Bosworth's, that Helene Chambers had information that would connect him with the crime?—a bit of gossip, an anecdote that Lydia Bosworth had written to her friend? If she had imparted such information, it would explain why the murderer was so anxious for Nancy to continue the impersonation. Nancy herself knew nothing, but might it not be that Helene Chambers, miles away at sea, and ignorant of the murders, might hold the key to the murderer's identity? At least that theory would explain why it was so important to the killer that the police should continue to believe that Nancy Reynolds was Helene Chambers.

It was too bad that the telegrams had been destroyed, for, under pressure, the frightened houseboy had admitted to Ismael that he had thrown away the damp wads of paper, and that they had been burned with the rubbish, and Saidi had admitted matter-of-factly that she had been the one to put the Mem's shoes outside to be cleaned. So, that one small mystery had been cleared up. Tomorrow, Ismael would get copies of the telegrams; possibly there had been something significant in Miss Chambers' message which Nancy had overlooked.

There was so much that should already have been done; but as McCleary complained, no sooner did they make a little headway in one angle of the case, than a new tragedy occurred, and all the routine work and

questioning had to be started over again. Ismael hadn't even had time to think about the case in an attitude of peace and receptiveness which was always essential for him. Now, in the quiet of these early hours, he was confident that he could make progress.

First, he decided, he must get a new report about the month's rubber production from Hamilton. The man who had rifled the files at the factory apparently hadn't realized that the engineer still had the rough notes from which the report had been made. Of course, it was possible that Hamilton himself had destroyed the blue sheets, but even so, the figures could be obtained from the Government offices; they had a record of all rubber shipped; they did their own weighing, too, so that their figures would be absolutely accurate. When he talked to them, Ismael decided he would get reports on the rubber production for the whole district. Not that he could see exactly what bearing they could have on this case, but he was meticulous about details, and painstaking both in the acquisition of information and in piecing it together. Only by knowing as much as possible about the life, the history and the character of everybody involved in a crime could he discover the guilty person.

Vaguely in Ismael's mind the personality of the murderer was taking shape; a man, cold and cunning and ruthless; whose every word and look and deed was calculated; a man who, during his life on the estate had assumed a role so successfully that no one had penetrated

it. No one, that was, except Lydia Bosworth in the last second of her life—she alone had seen the cruelty and purpose behind the mask of friendship. John Harvy had been spared that knowledge; he hadn't seen which trusted hand had struck him from behind; nor could Farnsworth have known which of his comrades had cut off his life.

Ismael changed the direction of his thoughts. He remembered when he had first arrived at this house he had told McCleary impulsively that he wanted the answers to just one or two questions from each of the people involved, and, although he hadn't actually committed himself in words, he had thought at the time that if he had truthful replies to those key questions, he could solve Lydia Bosworth's murder. He wondered now whether those answers would solve the two additional murders. Some had already been answered: he knew now why Nancy Reynolds had arrived when she did, and about her relations with Lydia. He knew that Betty Harvy had been out with Clive Bosworth, and so had been unaware of the lights being off; he knew too how the lights had happened to go off. He knew what John Harvy had been so anxious to discuss with Clive that night; and he knew about Jim Mason's kris. He knew that Clive Bosworth had probably cared as much for his wife as he was capable of caring for any woman; and that unless he was a more successful liar than Ismael considered him, his feeling for Mrs. Harvy was a passing

one. Nor, according to his statements on the veranda that evening, which had been duly passed on to Ismael by the constable, did he hate the East as much as people had assumed. There were still some questions to be answered: he didn't know what hold Mike Sullivan had on Clive, or perhaps, what hold Clive had on Mike Sullivan. Likewise, he was not yet satisfied about the walk that Mrs. Bosworth had taken the afternoon of her death, despite the flowers she had brought back with her. Would the answer to those questions disclose the identity of the murderer? No one knew better than Ismael himself how vital it was to solve the murders as quickly as possible if the life of the little American girl was to be saved. The murderer was willing to take any desperate risk to preserve his secret; and it seemed to Ismael, thinking over the circumstances of each murder, that the killer was becoming progressively bolder, more contemptuous of the forces pitted against him. When a man became so confident of his superiority over others, he grew careless, although, Ismael admitted with a sigh, in spite of the brief time he had had to commit Farnsworth's murder, the criminal had left no fingerprints even on the door key. So far, the killer, from his own viewpoint, had made only one mistake; he had spared Nancy's life; and that was a mistake, Ismael felt convinced, which would be rectified the first moment he found the American girl alone.

CHAPTER XVII

If only she knew what to expect, whom to fear, Nancy thought as she moved restlessly about in the big, mosquito-nettinged bed, she could meet whatever happened with some degree of fortitude. It was the uncertainty that made the situation so demoralizing. Never before had she gone to bed deliberately and left the lights all burning so that at intervals she could raise herself on her elbow and peer into every corner. She could hear the measured tramp of the constables' feet as they circled the house, hear their testing of her shutters every ten minutes. Outside in the hall, she caught the occasional creak of the rattan chair as Ismael shifted his position. The house too was awake; above the swishing of the breeze, the spatter of rain, and the sudden scurrying of lizards and mice, she could hear the floor boards groan as though invisible feet pressed them, and the white plaster walls seemed to creak and strain.

Nancy shivered. She didn't want to die; but if she had to, she wanted to meet death face to face, not have it clutch her from behind with strangling fingers or a stabbing stroke as it had John Harvy, not have it smother her in her sleep, as it had Dave Farnsworth. "My curiosity

will be the death of me," she said with a thin humor that didn't at all divert her thoughts. The most horrible thing of all was the knowledge that one of the people with whom she had been so closely associated, some of whom she had come to like, was even now planning how he could eliminate her. In her last moment would she have an opportunity to know whether it was Mike or Clive, Bill Pearson or Jim, or Ronald Hamilton? Betty was out of the picture actively, at any rate, though what part she might have in the plot, Nancy couldn't tell. The very fact that she had spoken so frankly to Clive on the veranda, early in the evening, made Nancy skeptical; and his repudiation of her, his sudden determination to stick to his job, sounded just a bit too good to be true. On the other hand, Betty was obviously mercenary; she was very good-looking, and just the type to appeal to the majority of men—well, with a hundred thousand dollars, she would know that she could do a lot better than Clive Bosworth. She had probably been giving him notice that she was going to run out on him.

Not until a chill, drizzly dawn had changed the blackness of night into the light wet grey of morning, did Nancy finally fall into a deep, dreamless sleep. It was ten o'clock when she was startled into fearful wakefulness by a banging on her door. "Are you all right, Helene?" She shivered and shrank farther under the bedclothes as she recognized Mike Sullivan's voice. He had repeated the inquiry with growing alarm before she could steady

her dry lips to reply, "Yes, I was asleep. You woke me."

"Sorry," he apologized. "I got the wind up a bit when you kept on not putting in an appearance—if you understand what I mean."

"Where's Ismael?" She tried to make her question sound casual by adding, "I'm under police orders not to open the door except to him or to Mr. McCleary."

"Good Lord! I don't want to come in," Mike exclaimed in alarm. "I just wanted to be sure you were all right. I don't know where Ismael has gone; he simply faded away a couple of hours ago, but there's a policeman outside here who is regarding me with the deepest suspicion, and fingering his baton as though he itched to place it in the back of my scalp. McCleary is taking poor Pearson over the hurdles at the moment—not that that will do him any good, or Pearson either—but I'll tell McCleary you are ready to have the embargo lifted."

An involuntary smile curved her lips, and her heart felt at least two tons lighter for listening to the Irishman's nonsense. Mechanically she started to dress, pleased, half way in the process, to find herself absorbed in the choice between her yellow linen with schoolgirlish white round collar, or the more sophisticated tan and brown pongee with its smart brown jacket. It was embarrassing, when McCleary's hearty voice sounded outside the door, to tell him he would have to wait until she had gone to the bathroom. Her face was very pink and young as she scuttled

past him, clutching her peach-colored negligée around her, but he was so completely matter-of-fact when she gave him a sideward look from under her long lashes, that she found herself completely unembarrassed as she cleaned her teeth and made a thorough job of her ablutions.

He was still standing there when she emerged from the bathroom, talking in Malay to the constable, and she gave him the most fleeting of smiles. "Two minutes only now, Mr. McCleary—the worst is over. You'll be surprised."

He was not only surprised but pleased; that lady maid's job had irked him, but Ismael had been so insistent—and anyway, here she was, in exactly two minutes, as sweet and fresh as a man's heart could wish which was not completely sterile as was his own. No coquetry either, just a nice young girl in a fresh yellow dress. In spite of himself, McCleary's heart warmed to her.

"It's damper than ever outside," he said. "Sullivan thought you'd be more comfortable having breakfast indoors. Funny," he added as he drew her chair back and pushed her with a mighty shove forward so that her kneecaps hit an undersupport, "every one seems to shun the house. Here you are all comfortable with a breakfast tray in front of you, and yet, do you know, most of those bloody, beg-your-pardon, bally fools—er idiots, preferred to sit on that wet porch, and balance a plate on one shivering knee, and a shaking coffee cup in his hand?"

It's beyond me. Sullivan was the only sensible person; he and I had our breakfast here in peace and comfort."

Nancy felt guilty at accepting McCleary's approval, for she too would have preferred to do a juggling act with plates and cups than eat where she was, although she was vaguely pleased that Mike Sullivan and McCleary had assumed that she felt as they did.

"Where is Ismael?" Nancy asked cautiously, sipping the steaming coffee.

"I don't know; queer tight-mouthed little beggar. Makes it a bit hard to work with him because you never know what is going on behind that flat brown face of his. He routed me out to say that I was to keep my eye on you; and then, as calm as you please he said, 'I think, Tuan, when I return, I will be able to point out the murderer,' and off he buzzed!"

Nancy leaned forward, her face alight. "Oh, what a relief it will be!" and then she paused uncertainly and her anxiety was obvious as she added, "Whom do you think he suspects?"

McCleary, aware suddenly of his indiscretion, shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. And please regard what I just said as a confidence—no use forewarning the murderer. Not," he added hastily, "that I believe the case will be solved so quickly. Are you through there?" he asked, "because I've work to do."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Nancy said impudently, "I thought you just wanted to keep me company. I'd forgotten for

all of five minutes that I was a sort of ward in chancery. However, I don't want anything more. What do we do now?"

"I don't care what you do, so long as you take care of yourself, and don't run into trouble," McCleary growled. "You'd better keep close to the crowd on the veranda. They're all out there—the laborers aren't working again on account of the rain, so no one has anything to do except cool his heels and criticize the police."

"Well, my heels are cool enough, goodness knows. This dampness has penetrated right through to my marrow—and I certainly don't intend to criticize the police. I don't see how either you or Ismael could possibly have done more than you are doing." Her smile was unexpectedly sweet as she pushed back her chair. "However, I'll take myself off your hands anyway by going out with the others."

"So here you are at last, lazybones," Jim Mason said, coming forward to take her arm with an affectionate grip. "I thought you were never going to come out. Been waiting hours. Come over here—I've a chair all ready. I spent most of the night thinking of the things I wanted to say to you—I'm afraid I bungled yesterday." His voice was low and anxious. "I didn't mean to crowd you. You can take all the time you want, of course. Only, if you could give me a little bit of hope, some right to take care of you——"

Nancy laughed a little breathlessly, but she allowed

Jim to lead her to the chair he had reserved beside his. Mike Sullivan, engrossed in a three-cornered conversation with Pearson and Hamilton, had merely nodded to her. His green eyes weren't mocking as she expected; they were worse than that, they didn't notice her at all.

"What I really want to know is," Jim said, awkwardly tucking her coat around her—he had none of the easy grace, the skilled competence in small attentions which came so naturally to Clive Bosworth; but Nancy found herself liking him the better for his clumsiness, "is whether I am repulsive to you? If I'm not, then I am sure I can make you care for me. Believe it or not, you are the first girl I've ever asked to marry me. I just never had time to fall for anybody before, I guess; been too busy. But, I've got quite a bit of money saved up, and I'm ready now to go back to the States and take over the job that's waiting for me there."

"But I thought you liked the East so much!" Nancy exclaimed. "I thought you were planning to be out here for several years."

Jim shook his head. "No, I'm going back home. The things that have happened here have spoiled this place for me, and I can't see taking a job on another estate. I know about growing rubber now, and about its raw state. I'm going back to the manufacturing end. There's more money there; and I want to be near my old man—he's getting on, you know. I want to repay him a little for all he has done for me." His voice was so deeply stirred that

Nancy gazed at him in surprise—she had never heard a man express, in a tone, the adoration of his father that Jim's did, nor seen a man's face so illuminated. As though aware of her surprise, Jim said hastily, "And anyway, the East is no place for a wife."

"You haven't one yet," Nancy reminded him, still thinking about Jim's devotion to his father, "and you can't be really sure that you'd want to marry me when you know me better. You might not like me at all." She'd have to make some plans soon, Nancy thought, remembering suddenly that she was penniless, and thousands of miles away from home. It seemed very coldblooded to be considering this proposal as a means of escape; but she must do something, and she honestly did like Jim; there was something reassuring about his very homeliness and sincerity. Of course he wasn't exactly the answer to a maiden's prayer, so far as looks and background were concerned, but her disillusioning experience in Penang, her knowledge of Clive Bosworth's disloyalty to Lydia, made her deeply distrustful of men with physical charm and easy manners.

"But what will happen here to the estate if you leave?" she asked to gain time. "Surely now that John Harvy is dead, Clive is going to need all the help he can get. Isn't it rather deserting the ship?"

"No, I don't think so," Jim said gravely. "It seems to me the best thing that could happen to the place would be for it to have a clean sweep; a new manager, and all

new assistants. Bosworth will never be able to pull it up, even if he sticks to it. I doubt if even poor old John could have. The best thing that could happen for the Semang Rubber Company would be to sell it. Let somebody else have the headaches. Once an estate gets a bad name, everything seems to go haywire with it. I don't know why, but I've seen it happen even in my time; the managers and assistants seem to feel that the whole thing is hopeless, they expect things to go flooey, and they do. Psychology, I suppose—though I'm not up very much on that. Anyway, if you ask any of the old-time rubber men they'll tell you the same thing, some estates are lucky, and some are unlucky, like ships. And once a place gets a bad name, believe you me, it's sunk!"

Nancy was impressed with his vehemence, and his concern about the estate. She knew that what he really had in mind was the fact that Clive Bosworth had committed the murders, and that after his arrest, Jim didn't want to profit by the promotions which would follow— Why, Jim would be manager, and Bill first assistant! How dreadful for both of them; and how impossible for either to accept. How could they stay on with the memory of the tragedies haunting every nook and corner?

"Say something, Helene!" Jim's voice was close to her ear, his bright blue eyes searching her face. "You seem so far away! What are you thinking? Are you frightened—worried? Tell me and let me help you!"

His use of the name "Helene" brought her face to face

with the unpleasant fact that Jim didn't even know who she really was; that in all fairness to him, she must tell him the truth before he committed himself any further. And yet, she had promised Ismael not to divulge her identity to any one, so all she could do was to prevent Jim from saying anything which he might later regret when she was free to tell him about the affair at Penang, about her deception.

"Don't, Jim. Don't say anything more," she said, withdrawing the hand he had seized. "Wait until Ismael gets back. I must talk to him first."

For a moment he stared at her as though about to make another appeal, and then abruptly he rose from his chair. "It's up to you," he muttered grumpily, and stalked into the house.

Nancy's face was rueful as she heard the door slam behind him. She hadn't meant to hurt his feelings, but if she had done so inadvertently, he needn't have gone off the deep end like that. Everybody was looking at her now, as though she had done something outrageous; and Mike Sullivan was coming across the veranda with his usual jaunty swagger and his laughing eyes.

"How's the Lord High Executioner this bright and glorious day?" he asked, dropping into the chair that Jim had just vacated. "And what was the crime for which poor Mason has been exiled?"

"You aren't funny," Nancy said coldly.

"I know I'm not, but it was the best I could do on the

spur of the moment. I've nothing against Mason except the efficiency with which he managed to corral you, and now I can forgive him even that."

"You are certainly an adept at concealing your emotions," Nancy replied tartly. "A casual observer would have thought you were completely immersed in your conversation with Mr. Pearson and Mr. Hamilton. You all looked as though the League of Nations depended on your verdict."

"So, you noticed that, did you! Poor Mason!" He grinned at her flushed and furious face.

"You're hateful," she flared. "I wish you'd go away. Why don't you go over and spoil Betty and Clive's tête-à-tête, since you enjoy being where you aren't wanted?" She glanced across the veranda at the two fair heads bent earnestly toward each other.

"No, you've reformed me in that direction. Once Clive is clear of this mess, I am through interfering in his life," Mike announced flatly.

Nancy's wide eyes were turned toward him expectantly, and Mike inwardly cursed the behavior which had aroused her interest, although at the same time he had an inexplicable desire to justify himself to her. "Clive," he explained carefully, "was a close friend of my young brother Denny—the places in Ireland where we spent our summers adjoined. Clive was a lonely chap, his mother died when he was born, and neither his father nor his older brother had any time for him, so he prac-

tically lived at our house. I was a bit older, of course, but I used to pal around with them. One day when we were out swimming on a bit of forbidden coast, the two little chaps got beyond their depths, were swept away in the current. I went for Denny, but he said he could hold out, that I should help Clive. I managed to fish Clive ashore, but—Denny was gone.”

“Oh,” Nancy’s voice was distressed. “How dreadful! I understand now why you feel so responsible for Clive.” Mike’s smile was sardonic—if she was satisfied with that explanation so much the better. He wouldn’t tell her about his mother’s dropping dead at his feet when she realized that Denny was lost. It had seemed unbearable at the time, but later he had been glad that she had gone so swiftly, before news of his father’s death had come; that she had died believing that her husband was a hero. At least she hadn’t had the pain of disillusionment which had been Mike’s when he had gone through his father’s private papers and discovered that the man he had worshipped was also the father of poor little Clive. How much Mr. Bosworth senior knew, Mike never fathomed; but he must have suspected there was something out of the way, for he had never taken any interest in the poor little beggar, just performed his perfunctory duty. Mike had burned the incriminating letters, and then, oppressed by the guilt and responsibility which had never apparently worried his father, had determined to watch over the brother he could never acknowledge. The people who had

known of Denny's death had accepted Mike's devotion to Clive quite matter-of-factly; and Clive himself had never questioned the sacrifices Mike had made at times to get him out of scrapes. And Mike himself had never doubted the wisdom of his own actions, until Nancy had challenged them. It was bitter to realize, as he did now, that he had been doing more harm than good to the one person in the world for whom he gave a damn—that Clive would be better off without him.

Nancy said nothing, she sat very still, her hands clasped in her lap, suffering vicariously the tragedy that had darkened Mike's boyhood. She sensed that there was more behind the story than he had told, but she didn't want to hear it; she couldn't bear to see the stricken expression in the Irishman's eyes.

Mike glanced at her, his voice once more mocking. "As soon as I see Clive safely settled, even if it means marrying him off to Betty, I'll be away—this time for good and all. I'll never again try to be a *deus ex machina*."

"Where will you go?" Nancy asked.

Mike shrugged. "I haven't thought about that. Perhaps to Borneo—I've never been in the interior there; and I've never shot a Kadiak Bear either, so I may decide on Alaska; or perhaps I may make a complete right-about-face and settle down in America, cut my own coupons for a change, and harry the Tycoons in the rubber business because my dividends aren't as large as they might be.

On the other hand, I might throw in my lot with the C. I. O. and go on a permanent sit-down strike."

Nancy was annoyed—she hated his flippancy. "And what will you do if they arrest Clive?" she asked. "McCleary told me—" She stopped short, remembering that the inspector had spoken to her in confidence.

"They won't touch Clive!" Mike's face darkened. "I'll confess myself before I'll let them arrest him." Without saying another word, or glancing down into Nancy's horrified face, he sprang from his chair and started across the veranda toward Clive and Betty.

"Tiffin is served, Tuan," Semut announced from the doorway; and slowly, reluctantly, the occupants of the veranda rose and made their way into the dining room.

Whether it was the usual depressing effect of the house, or the undercurrent of fear and suspicion engendered by the knowledge that one of their number was the murderer, Nancy didn't know, but none of the people gathered around the luncheon table could make much pretense of eating, nor any effort at conversation. Mike's words still rang in her ears, and she knew now that they had been merely a confirmation of her own suspicion. If his lawyers pleaded insanity, if they showed the dreadful lasting effects of his boyhood tragedy, proved that Clive had become an obsession with him, couldn't they prevent a death sentence? But then it would mean he would be shut away for the rest of his life in an insane asylum; and that would be even worse.

As though suddenly conscious of her gaze, Mike turned and addressed her quietly, "You won't repeat what I said, will you? If Clive is in the clear, it won't be necessary for me to take any action. I hadn't any right to burden your poor little New England conscience. Forget it all."

"Never," she declared fiercely. "I won't be made a party to anything so dreadful. Of course I'll tell, I'll stop you somehow."

"Shut up, you little fool." His voice was a hoarse whisper, hauntingly like that other whisper outside her wardrobe door, and his eyes seemed to flash their hatred. "I warn you to keep out of this."

She glanced swiftly around the table. Apparently nobody had heard him; people were pushing back their chairs, moving toward the door. With a half-muffled cry she sprang up, terrified that she might be left alone with Mike.

"Halloo, there's the sun!" Clive exclaimed, pointing to the rather watery pale light that had seeped through the clouds. "Come on, fellows, that means work. The coolies will be going out now, and we'll all have to work like niggers to make up for this rainy spell. Will you take a hand, Mike? If you could manage to take over for Farnsworth for a bit, it would help us out no end." Every one suddenly felt more normal at the prospect of something to do, and the men acted quite cheerful as they hurried off down the driveway.

"Oh, Mr. McCleary," Betty addressed the inspector who had strolled out onto the veranda, "will it be all right for me to go over to my bungalow and get some fresh clothes? I won't be gone long."

"Certainly," McCleary agreed, "I'll just speak to one of the constables." Betty laughed, "Let me take the little roly-poly one, won't you? He is the cutest of them all; I am thinking of buying a collar and leash for him and taking him back to England with me."

"You haven't gone back to England yet, my lady," McCleary growled, "and if you go where I think you're going, to take a policeman along would be like bringing coals to Newcastle." He strode to the door and shouted "Katidjo!"

Betty looked disconcerted. "Still has me cast for the role of villainess, apparently! I suppose it is easier for him to go on thinking that, than it is to exert a little intelligence and find the real murderer." She shrugged her shoulder, and moved over to the screen door where she stood impatiently tapping her foot, until a small, jolly-looking little constable appeared around the corner of the house. "Escort the Mem to the house of Tuan Harvy, and wait there with her, then bring her back here, Katidjo. Watch her carefully, do you understand?"

Disdaining to speak, Betty stalked down the steps and began to pick her way among the muddied puddles on the drive. McCleary stared grimly at her stiff back. "Brazen piece she is," he muttered, and then turning

abruptly to Nancy asked, "What are you going to do with yourself?"

"I hadn't thought," Nancy said. "It seems so good just to be lying here in the sun, and not having a crowd of people around, with all the under currents and tension."

McCleary nodded. "I know how you feel; they keep me stirred up too. Good idea for you to relax while you can. With every one out of the house, you ought to be safe enough, but I'm not going to take any chances: there's a constable squatting down there beside the front steps, with orders to admit no one, and there's another on the back veranda, with the same instructions. The servants have cleared the dining room and are back in their quarters, so the house is empty. Of course, if you are nervous, I'll stay here with you, but if you think you'll be all right, there are some things outside on the estate that I'd like to check up on. I'd be back in about an hour."

Nancy smiled. "Run along, I'll be all right." She was glad to see his broad back retreating; it was impossible to forget the murders when he was there; and now that he was gone, there was nothing to remind her, for the Malays were out of sight, if not out of sound. For a few minutes Nancy lay quietly in the long chair, but instead of finding the peace she expected after the inspector had left her, she found her mind running in circles about the murders, selecting first this person and then that one

as the guilty one; and rejecting each in turn, while all the time, try as she might to silence it, she heard Mike Sullivan's hoarse voice warning her, as the murderer had done. And Ismael would be back soon now, any minute, to name the killer. In an attempt to get her mind off that prospect, she began to think of her own discouraging future; a stranger masquerading as another person; twelve thousand miles from home, penniless and discredited for any job that required references. What to do about it!

She felt suddenly cool and realized that the sun was obscured once more by ominous clouds and a gusty small wind was again sprinkling drops of rain on the long-suffering porch. She decided that she would go inside and read; the men would all be coming back, since work apparently stopped automatically on the estate when rain began to fall, and she had no desire to be there when they arrived. She had taken a book to her room last night, a current best seller on which she had been unable to concentrate, but which, according to her favorite reviewers, merited attention. Perhaps now, in her different mood, with fear removed, she could concentrate upon it, and forget her surroundings. Remembering Ismael's grave warnings, she stepped to the veranda door and spoke to the unseen constable, telling him in groping, kindergarten Malay that she was going to her room. Apparently he grasped her intent, for his face was stretched into a broad grin as he sprang into

sight on the steps, and although she didn't understand his spurt of conversation, she gathered from his actions, and an occasional familiar word, that he would now guard over her safety from the veranda where it was comfortably dry. He squatted contentedly beside the open hall door. Nancy hesitated for a second. Ismael had said that a constable must be outside her bedroom whenever she was in there, and yet, with the house empty, McCleary had only ordered his men to watch the front and back entrances. She didn't want to cause any more trouble than she already had; she would just go to her room and get her book, and then come back to the veranda until Ismael or McCleary returned. They could settle the matter to their own satisfaction.

The hall was once more gray and dreary, as Nancy hurried along to her room, and it had the same depressing effect on her spirits. Well, it wouldn't take long to dash in, grab the book from the table beside her bed, and be out again. Nancy opened her door and stepped into her dim shadowy bedroom. The shutters were still closed, but the slats had been opened to admit thin bars of drab light that merely accentuated the damp gloom of the rest of the room. She shivered a little as she stepped inside—Ismael, she remembered suddenly, had made her promise always to bolt her door, and though she knew there was no one in the house, she turned punctiliously to carry out his instructions. Even as her hand groped for the bolt, she was aware of something behind her, but be-

fore she could throw open the door, or a scream could reach her lips, long, merciless fingers gripped her throat, drawing her back into the room. Frantically she tried to free herself from the strangling hold, her body, twisting and wrenching, disputing every inch of the way. If she could only kick over a chair, do something to bring help, but she had been dragged now into the center of the room where there was no furniture within reach of her kicking feet, and her rubber-soled shoes made no sound on the grass matting. She was going to die. Nothing could save her this time. With a final, despairing twist of her exhausted body, she turned sideways, and her bulging eyes stared into the distorted, merciless face of the man who had killed Lydia, John Harvy, Dave Farnsworth, and—now was going to kill her. Outrage, as she recognized the murderer, gave her a bit of strength—enough to fight backwards a few steps, and with a last, desperate effort hook her foot around the leg of the dressing table.

CHAPTER XVIII

At ten o'clock that Monday morning, Ismael was sitting in a small, dusty office in the Kluang police station, his ear glued to the telephone receiver, his right hand busily taking down notes. The white pages were covered with hastily scribbled figures, listed under separate headings, and at the moment were as meaningless as the inscriptions on the Rosetta Stone. The voice at the other end of the wire, in the Johore Government Record Office, stopped its monotonous recitations. "That's the whole lot. I've given you the rubber production now for the Semang Estate for the last six months, and also the rubber produced by the entire district. Anything more I can do for you, Inspector?"

Ismael studied the columns of figures and then asked thoughtfully, "Do you not think it strange, Tuan, that although the production of rubber from the Semang Estate has steadily decreased, the total production for the district remains approximately the same?"

There was an exclamation. "You're right. Something out of the way there. The Chief would have spotted it right away, but he's home on leave, and his number One is down with fever. The figures are handled by different

clerks here; that's what took me so long to get them for you. We'll look into the matter immediately and send an inspector up."

"How would you account for the discrepancy, Tuan?" Ismael's body was tense as he asked the question. "I am only seeking unofficial information, you understand, but it is very important that I have something to work on until your inspector arrives."

The voice hesitated. "I don't like to commit myself without an investigation, but, if you are just looking for a lead, I'd suggest that you look into the coolies on the Semang Estate, check up and see whether the rubber is being pirated."

Ismael concealed his satisfaction. "Can you suggest how that can best be done? I am unfamiliar with the routine, and I must work swiftly and alone. I can't trust any of the people on the estate."

"Well, the usual way rubber is pirated is by an extra, possibly a night tapping of the trees. Then the latex is smuggled off the estate and sold to some of the small native kabuns whose yield is low, and those fellows ship it out in the regular way with their own stuff. It's quite a racket, and hard to check if the coolies are careful, and the stolen rubber widely distributed among the small growers. Better get the mandurs together and work on the coolies through them, or else put out guards and catch the thieves red handed."

So that was it, Ismael thought after he had expressed

his gratitude and hung up the receiver. He knew that in good tapping, the bark was cut only one inch a month, but on the Semang Estate, instead of that, the trees were probably being tapped again at night, and the little white cups emptied not only in the morning, but in the afternoon or evening as well. Was that what Lydia Bosworth had seen the afternoon of her death; a coolie emptying the cups at an unusual hour, or had she perhaps stumbled on an unexplained supply of latex hidden in the jungle awaiting removal? It was probably a coolie she had noticed, something that seemed a bit out of the ordinary, but not of tremendous importance, for she had not spoken of it when she returned—or—if she had, no one had admitted it. If she had found a concealed supply of latex, Ismael felt sure she would have reported it immediately. He frowned. And yet, wasn't it possible that she had commented upon it to the man who had killed her; might not that have been the motive for her murder?

How much money was involved in the theft? Was it enough to warrant the risk, or was something even larger involved? He remembered the rumors current in London about the Semang Estate, the offers for purchase which had annoyed Mr. Bosworth senior; the record sheets which had been stolen from the estate, and the fact that no attempt had been made to prevent the original reports from going to London. Could it all be part of a plot to get control of the estate?

He mustn't waste time theorizing, Ismael reminded himself—already he had been away longer than he had planned, and he still had two errands to do before his work in Kluang was finished. He had to go to the telegraph office for copies of the telegrams which Nancy had taken, and he must make a round of all the kedais to learn whether any white man had made suspicious purchases within the last week or two.

Two hours later, a mud-stained, rain-streaked car was skidding crazily over sodden, rutted roads. Ismael was hunched over the wheel, his eyes fixed on the streaming windshield, his body braced to resist the wild lurching of the speeding car. It was a race between him and death. In his pocket he had evidence to convict the murderer; the copies of the telegrams. He knew now not only who the murderer was, but why it had been essential to him that Nancy conceal her identity; she was all that stood between him and the scaffold. It was so obvious, so simple. Ismael cursed himself for his blindness, cursed Nancy for her deception, but most of all he cursed the storm-drenched miles of road that still lay between him and the estate where even now the murderer might be carrying out his deadly work. Allah grant that he be in time.

"Where is she?" Ismael panted, flinging himself from the car and dashing up the steps.

The group of people on the veranda broke off their conversation to stare at him in amazement, "Who? I don't know, we just came back from the factory; what's

wrong?" The constable outside the hall door said quickly, "The young Mem went to her room maybe three-four minutes ago. But do not worry, Tuan, the back door is guarded, and I myself have seen that no one entered this door except the Mem until Tuan McCleary returns. He comes now."

Ismael didn't wait to hear the sentry. His first apprehensive glance at the veranda showed him that both Nancy and the man he now knew to be the murderer were missing. As he raced into the house, he heard a heavy crash, the sound of shattering glass, and an instant later Ismael hurled himself against Nancy's door. The flimsy catch gave way, and the murderer, dropping the girl's limp body, sprang at the detective's throat. His viciousness was his undoing, for he stumbled over Nancy's motionless form and spread-eagled at Ismael's feet. Before he could struggle up, or Ismael could act, the sturdy but dumb little constable, who had been guarding the back door, dashed into the room and brought his truncheon down with terrific force on the murderer's head.

McCleary thrust his way through the group of people who were swarming into the house, and hurried into Nancy's room. "What's going on here?" he demanded, staring in bewilderment at Ismael who was lifting the girl onto the bed, and at the proud little constable who had mounted guard over the prostrate figure of a man sprawled face downward across the wreckage of the dressing table.

"Please, Tuan, tell the constable to guard the door and keep people out," Ismael requested over his shoulder, "and also handcuff that son of Shaitan on the floor before he again becomes his evil self."

McCleary barked an order at the constable who promptly took his place in the doorway, blocking the excited people who were clamoring for admittance. Lights flashed on; and white, incredulous faces peered into the room over the rigid shoulders of the constable; their horrified gaze shifting from Ismael who was rhythmically pumping air into the lungs of the half-strangled girl on the bed, to McCleary who was snapping handcuffs on the recumbent figure on the floor.

"But how did you know it was Jim Mason?" McCleary asked when the excitement had died down sufficiently so that his voice could be heard above the babel of exclamations and questions. Jim Mason, a constable on either side of him, slumped in a chair by the window, his face turned sullenly away. Betty Harvy was holding a bottle of aromatic ammonia under Nancy's nose, while Mike Sullivan, with hands surprisingly gentle, bathed her forehead and her bruised neck with ice water. The rest of the group, under a pledge not to molest the prisoner, were allowed to enter the room. It was unusual, McCleary knew, but he wished to make amends for his former suspicions, and it seemed to him that they were entitled to hear Ismael's explanations.

"It was the telegrams, Tuan." Ismael's soft voice

sounded loud in the hushed expectancy of the room. "I should have known as soon as Miss Reynolds told me of the murderer's anxiety that she conceal her identity, but I was handicapped by my unfamiliarity with the routine of the estate. I looked for something that might have been in the telegrams, and thus, I missed what was so obvious. I had pieced together the greed behind the murders. I was sure that rubber was being pirated, but the money from that was secondary. The real object was to force the sale of the estate to a large American rubber company which coveted it.

"When I had learned so much from my telephoning this morning, I went to all the kedais in Kluang, seeking to learn if a white man had recently purchased a dagger similar to the one belonging to Tuan Mason which had fitted the wounds on the first two victims, but which had not been used to commit the crimes. I found at length a small Chinese shop on the outskirts of the town, and the owner told me that on the day Mrs. Bosworth was killed, a white man had purchased a small dagger from his assistant. Unfortunately the assistant had been discharged for dishonesty, and I had no time then to seek him. The owner, of course, could not describe the man who had bought the dagger, but from his description of the weapon, it seemed just such a one as Tuan Mason's. I went next to the telegraph office to request copies of the telegrams, and there, with the first words of the operator, the case was finished. He asked, 'Didn't Mr. Mason de-

liver the telegrams? I was just closing up Friday night when I saw him come out of the Rest House, so I asked him to take them out to Mrs. Bosworth—saved us a thirty-mile run.’ ”

Ismael paused. “So simple as that, Tuan.”

“But why did he kill Lydia?” Clive cried indignantly. “She’d always been decent to him, and he seemed to like her. Buying her a present, and then, by God! killing her with it!”

“If you would like it, I will tell you what I think happened,” Ismael said. “But you will understand it is only as I see the happenings in these sad days—we have yet to prove many things.”

There was an eager murmur of assent, and the little Malay began his reconstruction of the crimes. “I do not think Tuan Mason intended to kill Mrs. Bosworth when he came to the house that night, but after he had given her the telegrams, she made the mistake which cost her her life. She remembered something she had seen on her walk that afternoon, and in all innocence, she asked Mason what it meant. She had either seen coolies emptying the latex cups at an unusual time, or had come upon buckets of latex hidden in the jungle. That will be discovered when we question the coolies. Now that we know of the pirating, they will talk, and so will the kabuns to whom the latex was sold, for all natives have a fear of being mixed up in a white murder. Mason knew that Mrs. Bosworth had only to mention what she had seen

to any one connected with the estate, and his plot would have been exposed. So, he stabbed her. Frightened by his crime, he turned off the light and hurried away, forgetting about the telegrams. Before he had an opportunity to come back to the house, Miss Reynolds had arrived and found the body. She had also taken the telegrams, and for reasons of her own later decided to masquerade for a time as Miss Chambers. Mason felt that he was safe so long as she concealed her real identity, for then there was no occasion for any one to know about the telegrams he had delivered."

"But why did he kill John?" Betty asked.

"Murder breeds murder," Ismael declared. "A man can die only once, and after he has taken one life, he has nothing to lose by killing again and again. Tuan Harvy was killed because he was determined to get to the root of the rubber shortage—and I think, from his anxiety to talk to Tuan Bosworth, something had aroused his suspicions. His mistake had been in trusting his assistants so completely that in his search for the cause of the lower production, he didn't suspect pirating of the rubber, for only with the connivance of one of the assistants could the theft have been carried on over so long a period, without discovery. So Tuan Harvy had to die. And then, because Tuan Farnsworth saw Mason come out of the jungle, he, too, had to be killed. Then only Miss Reynolds remained to endanger him, but for her, he felt a softness. If he could have persuaded her to marry him,

to trust him as an accepted lover, or to frighten her into keeping silence, he would never have harmed her. But instead of turning toward him, he saw her alienated, interested more and more in the Irishman whom he feared and hated. And so, he made up his mind that she too must die."

The look of abhorrence which his former friends cast in the direction of Mason attested eloquently to their feelings, but the blunt-featured profile by the window showed no emotion. His half-closed eyelids veiled his hatred of the insignificant little Malay who was responsible for his predicament, who was so uncannily tracing his thoughts and his actions. But they'd never have the satisfaction of hearing the truth from him. "Least said, soonest mended!" His father would get him a good lawyer—his father had seen him through plenty of scrapes. He'd be pretty sick about this one though—but he'd have to help, just to save his own face.

It was Pearson who broke the hostile silence, a Pearson rejuvenated since, at Ismael's suggestion, he had had a blunt talk with Doctor Sparkes and been convinced of his own mental health. "What happened to the dagger he used on Lydia and John? Why didn't he use that on poor Farnsworth, and Miss Chambers—er, Reynolds? It was quicker, and he wouldn't have been caught."

"For that, Tuan, we must all thank Allah!" Ismael said in heartfelt tones, glancing at the bed where Nancy was sitting, her bright head resting against Mike's broad

shoulder. "Of course I do not know, but I think that after Tuan Mason committed the first murder, he hid the dagger somewhere on the estate, between this house and his own, or between his bungalow and the kampong. It doesn't matter, for in the morning when he hurried off to kill Tuan Harvy, he unearthed it once more. After his second evil deed was done, back he plunged the weapon into the earth, for he couldn't have concealed it on his person when he reported at the coolie line in shorts and an open shirt. A small reward offered to the coolies will, I am sure, produce it. Later, when he had the chance to kill Tuan Farnsworth, he had neither the time nor the opportunity to get the dagger, so he used a cord. The same holds true for this afternoon; he had no weapon to use on Miss Reynolds save his own bare hands."

Jim Mason stirred restlessly. Was nothing hidden from that damn Malay? How did he manage to follow the thoughts of a white man?

"And how did the murderin' bastard get in here to-day, with both doors guarded?" Hamilton asked belligerently.

McCleary looked uncomfortable. "That was my fault," he admitted. "I had a man at both doors, and the house was empty. Miss Reynolds was on the veranda resting when I left. I forgot the door at the head of the basement stairs, or rather I forgot that it wasn't locked—I'd sent the key off to Kluang to be examined for finger-

prints. I know you said there weren't any on it, Ismael, but I didn't want to take a chance. I knew the men were all off working, and as soon as the rain started, I hurried back. I was looking for the dagger." He glanced sheepishly at Pearson, whose bungalow he had so fruitlessly ransacked.

To relieve McCleary's embarrassment, Ismael said practically, "I think, Tuan, it will be well to send a cable to America, for obviously it was there that the plot was born."

Jim Mason started; his thoughts were confused, but between them, fear ran like a panic-stricken rabbit. With things buzzing in America, his father and the rest of them would leave him out on a limb—no one would dare raise a finger to help him. Under heavy lids he glanced furtively at the windows, at the door. If he made a dash, enough of a furor, they might shoot him, and that would be better than hanging.

"I think, Tuan McCleary, it would be well to remove the prisoner," Ismael said quietly. Thankful of an excuse for action, McCleary barked an order to the constables and picked up his topee as the important little matamatas urged Mason toward the door.

There was a general movement, people rising to their feet, and pressing forward to express their gratitude to the man who had solved the case, who had vindicated, and at the same time avenged them. "Wonderful—simply marvellous," Betty Harvy exclaimed with a soulful roll

of her eyes. "But I want to ask him—" Her words were lost in the jumble of deeper voices, Hamilton proposing a toast to Ismael, Pearson saying, "Are you going to stick it, Bosworth? Good, would you like me to stay on?" Mike Sullivan, with eyes on Nancy, said firmly, "I'm staying too—feel like a spot of work."

Ismael saw them all moving toward him, and perspiration broke out on his forehead. He dreaded the ordeal of congratulations, of praise. He didn't deserve credit; the little American girl had blocked him, fooled him almost to the last minute. He felt hot all over when he thought of the report he would have to make in Johore, and of Tuan Campbell's laughter. He must get away from here.

"One moment, Tuan McCleary," Ismael called as the officer started down the hall, "I will come with you."

McCleary looked back at him in surprise. Ismael was suddenly just a small plump Malay. "Tabeh, Mem Reynolds—tabeh, Mem Harvy, tabeh, Tuan-Tuan." His voice was the humble one of a native servant, his ducking bobs, as he backed through the doorway, those of a shopkeeper. The white people paused uncertainly, their words of appreciation lost, their outstretched hands falling lifelessly to their sides as Ismael slipped unobtrusively past them. "Why," Betty Harvy exclaimed in a disappointed voice, "he's nothing but a native after all. I'd forgotten."

Outside in the teeming rain, Ismael smiled happily.

